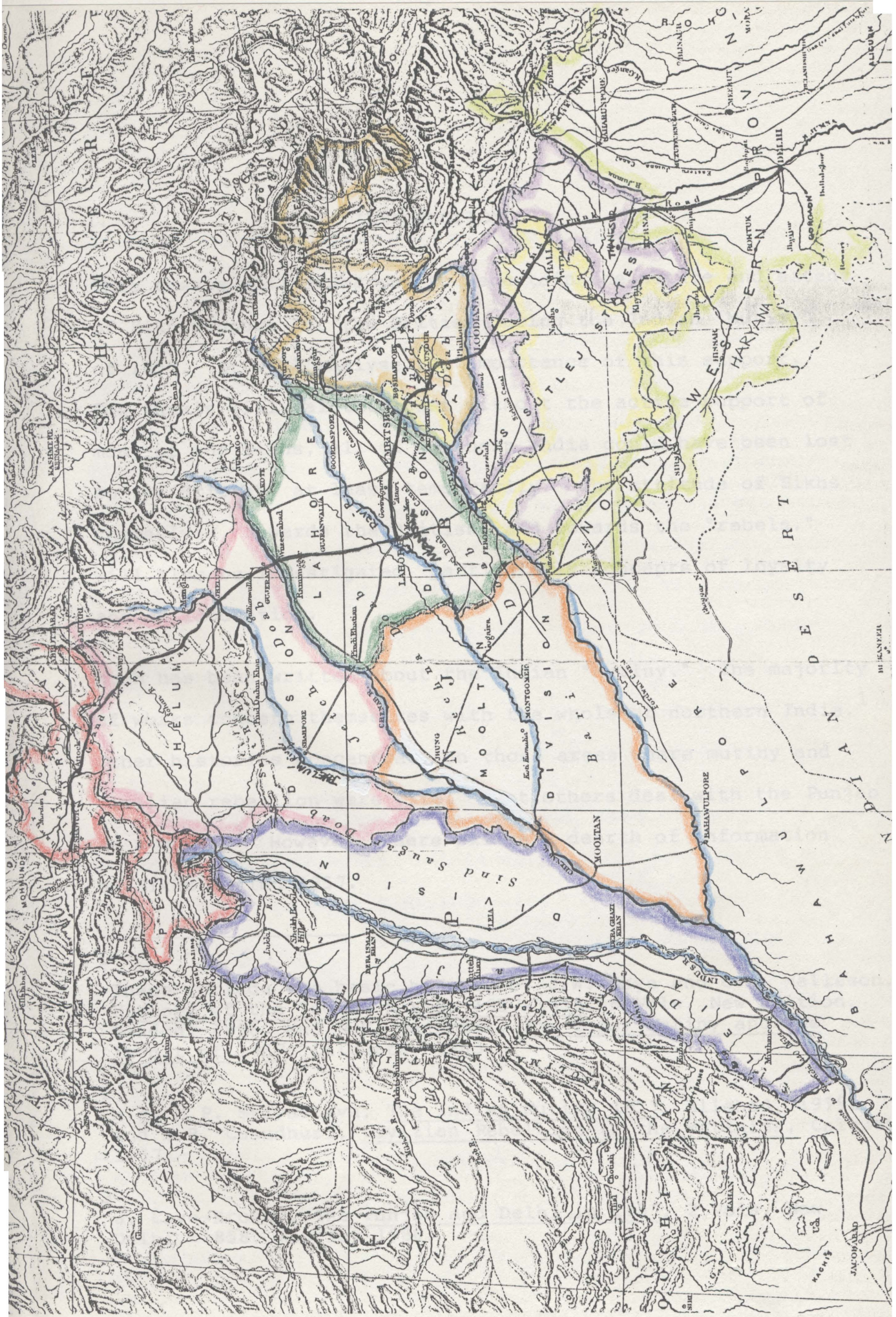
Why were the Sikhs loyal to the British, if indeed they were, during the Indian Mutiny of 1857?

This thesis
is presented for the Degree
of
Master of Arts in History
in the
University of Canterbury
by

Pauline Spence

University of Canterbury
1993

CONTENTS



Source: R. Bosworth Smith, Life of Lord Lawrence

1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis will endeavour to ascertain the nature and extent of Sikh support for the British during the Indian "Mutiny" of 1857. It will analyse the importance of this support. The thesis will maintain that without the active support of many of the Sikhs, all of northern India could have been lost to the British, at least temporarily. The attitude of Sikhs themselves, towards the British, and towards the "rebels," will also be investigated, particularly concepts of loyalty and collaboration.

Much has been written about the Indian "Mutiny." The majority of works concern themselves with the whole of northern India.[1] Other histories concentrate on those areas where mutiny and civilian rebellion were rife.[2] Yet others deal with the Punjab as a whole.[3] However, there exists a dearth of information on Sikhs during 1857.

---

1 These include the basic history by J.W. Kaye and G.B. Malleson, History of the Indian Mutiny 1857-1858. 6 Vols. New Edition, London, 1896, and R.C. Majumdar, The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857, Calcutta, 1963.

2 e.g. M.P. Srivastava, The Indian Mutiny 1857, Allahad, 1979, and S.B. Chaudhuri, Civilian Rebellion in the Mutinies, Calcutta 1957.

3 J. Cave-Browne, The Punjab and Delhi in 1857, 2 Vols. New Delhi, 1858. Reprint 1986.

An important aim of this thesis is to redress some of the conclusions Domin reaches.[4]

It is pertinent that the position of Sikhs during the "Mutiny" be examined at this time for three main reasons. The first is the suspect ideology of Domin's work. Her quasi-Marxist viewpoint does not allow other interpretations. Furthermore, she places a great deal of emphasis on agrarian changes brought about by the British policy of integrating the British-controlled provinces into the capitalist world economy. This is perceived as a major factor in alienating the peoples of Oudh and the North Western Provinces, in particular. Conversely, she argues the non-enlightened land policies of the British in the Punjab resulted in the active support of the predominantly rural Sikhs.

However, Eric Stokes and Thomas Metcalf[5] take exception to the commonly held conclusion that it was British land tenure policy that decided the support or rebellion of the people of any particular area. Focussing on the North-Western Provinces they argue that high or low land rent assessments, and/or land transfers were not the overwhelming reason for the reactions of any particular group of people in 1857.

---

4 Dolores Domin, India in 1857-59. A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People's Uprising. Berlin, 1977.

5 Eric Stokes, The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in agrarian society and peasant rebellion in Colonial India. Cambridge Jniversity Press 1978; Thomas R. Metcalf, Land, Landlords and the British Raj. Northern India in the Nineteenth Century. London 1979.

As Stokes maintains, it is necessary to look beyond British land policies to such vagaries as the political motivations of the traditional elites. Loss of lordship rights was far more important than the financial loss to many landholders.[6] Traditional bonds of allegiance remained influential in 1857 throughout northern India. This, we shall find out, was also the case in the Punjab.

The second reason for this thesis is the virtual absence of discussion of the "Mutiny" in J.S. Grewal's New Cambridge History of India.[7] I believe 1857 was a period in the development and evaluation of the Sikh panth that was undeniably of importance, and, as such, should be included in a study of Sikhs.

The third main reason is the recent availability of the Punjab Mutiny Reports, which have been reprinted in two volumes, and are housed in the Canterbury university library. A further reason is the availability of the District Gazetteers and the Settlement Reports on microfilm, which makes it possible to research such a topic in New Zealand. However, such contemporary British accounts frequently echo one another in their attitudes

---

6 Stokes, p135.

7 J.S. Grewal, New Cambridge History of India. The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press 1990.

towards their own good government, and how it benefits their subjects. They must be treated with due caution.

In discussing Sikhs of any period, the problem of identification must be dealt with. When the British annexed the Punjab in 1849 there was no precise meaning of the term Sikh. It applied to a variety of identities loosely grouped under the heading of Sikh.[8] In the mid-nineteenth century Sikhs generally were perceived by the British to be Khalsa Sikhs. They openly displayed the Khalsa symbols, were excellent horsemen, and had been a formidable enemy of the British in two recent wars. However, this gives the impression that Sikhs were a homogeneous group. This was not the case in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sikhs were neither a unified body, nor were they easily defined. While Khalsa Sikhs were the very visible face of Sikhdom, there were many other who called themselves Sikhs. Chapter three addresses the problem of identification of Sikhs in some detail.

We shall notice that it is often difficult to differentiate between Sikhs on the one hand, and other Punjabis on the other. Most of the contemporary reports do not distinguish between the two, even in discussing such topics as the composition of the military forces. It was not until after the fall of

---

8 Richard Fox, Lions of the Punjab. California 1985, pp108-112.

Delhi that Khalsa Sikhs were inducted into the regular army, wherein all Sikh soldiers were required to wear Khalsa symbols. Until at least that time it was more usual to refer to caste type than to religious affiliation.

Sikhs[9] occupied a unique position in the Punjab in that they constituted a minority of the population of the province, even in their homeland of the Lahore and Amritsar districts, the so-called Manjha,[10] yet held a privileged and powerful position, primarily due to having been favoured by the Sikh government of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. This situation was reinforced by the British, by a continuation of certain Sikh policies, and by the introduction of policies aimed at producing a stable yet productive rural community.

Rural Sikhs, predominantly Jats, were skilled husbandmen and agriculturists, which earned them a position of importance and continuing favour. Their lack of prejudice at taking up the plough, which had inhibited the success and progress of such people of high social status as Rajputs, who would rather lose their land than demean themselves tilling the soil,

---

9 Throughout the thesis I will use the term Sikh, referring to the general community of Sikhs, or Panth, unless I am discussing a particular section of the Panth.

10 General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1854-55 to 1855-56 inclusive. Calcutta, 1856. p70.

endeared Sikhs to the British. Their skill in farming was matched by their martial skills. Sikhs could take to the sword as readily as to the plough.

Variation and Complexity

Individuals and groups within northern Indian society responded to the outbreak of mutiny in different ways. The incidence of rebellion, including civilian insurrection, was widespread throughout Oudh and the North Western Provinces, for instance, whereas there were only sporadic or half-hearted outbreaks in the Punjab. The nature of disturbances in the older provinces varied greatly from that in the Punjab. Furthermore, within the Punjab there was a variety of responses to the "Mutiny," dependent upon region, background, caste, race or 'tribal' grouping, and even local antagonisms or old feuds. Particular responses to the "Mutiny" were also, to a degree, dependent upon British administrative and land policies of any given area.

In the Punjab itself there existed manifold divisions, religious, social, economic and geographic. Although religious divisions at first appear straightforward, in practice they were not. Culture did not necessarily answer the dictates of religion.[11]

---

11 P.H.M. Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition, Influence and Authority in Nineteenth Century India. London 1972. p36.

Amongst the major divisions of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs certain traditions and cultures cut across religion. For example, Jats, who constitute a large proportion of the population of rural Punjab, may have been Muslim, Sikh or Hindu. Religious practices, and social customs, differed from district to district, according to the variables of climate, geography, land fertility, land ownership, and so on. This goes to show that one cannot easily generalise about Sikhs.

British Policy

A common dislike, and mistrust, of 'Purbiahs,' shared by Punjabis, particularly Sikhs who had fought against them in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars, was a characteristic utilised by the British to further their own ends.[12] By emphasising ethnic, religious, cultural and social divisions the British found it easier to direct and control people and events.

While the British held Sikhs in great respect, they were also very wary of their predilection for militancy and their martial skills. By continuing policies initiated by Ranjit Singh they hoped to keep Sikhs pacified. In the years prior to the revolt the British also recruited Sikhs into the Military Police, the civilian police and into the army, that is the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force and Bengal Army.[13]

---

12 Purbiah was a common term in the Punjab for a Hindustani. Literally it means a person from the East. It was often used in a derogatory manner.

13 Former Khalsa soldiers were not enlisted into these forces.

Early British land policy tended to favour the peasantry, while measures were taken to weaken the power base of the aristocracy.

The British learnt from their mistakes in the North-Western Provinces where events and reactions showed they had set the land revenue settlements far too high, and thereby alienated the rural masses. So, in the ensuing summary land settlements the British pitched the tax ratio relatively low, and implemented a number of policies aimed at benefitting the peasant proprietors, of whom a large proportion were Sikhs.

Significance of Sikhs

After the second Anglo-Sikh War the British introduced policies which reinforced by law the former privileged position of Sikh peasants. Because of their particular aspect of British policy Sikhs, having lost their independence just a decade before the "Mutiny" "were not forced by adverse circumstances to side against the colonial power."[14]

In this thesis I maintain that, overall, the majority of Sikhs supported the British; of those who did not actively support the British, in the main they did not join the "rebels" against the British, and so they played a decisive role in the outcome of the mutiny. However, the Sikhs were not alone in their

---

14 Domin, p50.

support of the British, as the majority of Punjabis also were at least not actively against the British. As the British regained Delhi and control of the Punjab, the province was able to supply recruits for service in the still-rebellious provinces. In this manner the Punjab, including Sikhs, helped to bring the whole of northern and central India under the yoke of British rule once more.

I also intend to discuss the exceptions to the loyal Sikhs, those Sikhs who chose to fight on the side of the "rebels" against the British, particularly in Delhi, and in the North-Western Provinces.

The penultimate chapter deals with Delhi and that city's importance in the outcome of the mutiny and of civilian rebellion.

2. THE PATTERN OF MUTINY

Outbreak of Mutiny

Rumblings of discontent had been discernible throughout northern India since 1856, but it took specific grievances to precipitate a full-scale mutiny. British authorities had tended to ignore, or at least regard as insignificant, all the signs of disaffection amongst sepoy regiments. There had been previous small-scale mutinies, or near-mutinies, such as that at Vellore in 1806.

As the armed forces of British India steadily grew, European troops became vastly outnumbered by Indians, by almost seven to one.[1] The troops of the Bengal Army often were sent to fight in far-flung reaches of the Empire. Lord Dalhousie's rampant annexation campaign was adding new territories to the British conquests in India throughout the late 1840s and 1850s. In a statement delivered soon after his arrival, in 1848, in India, Dalhousie reiterated the policy of the Government regarding annexation by stating that when any opportunity presented itself of acquiring territory or revenue he would not be slow to take advantage.[2] When he proclaimed the annexation of the Punjab on 29 March 1849 he was conforming to the prevalent views of the time. When, previously, the

---

1 Michael Edwardes, Red Year. The Indian Rebellion of 1857. London, 1973, p21.

2 Domin, p23.

Bengal Army had been posted to remote areas the sepoys were paid batta, an extra field allowance for foreign service. Now that these distant lands were part of the British Empire, foreign service allowance was no longer applicable. This was one grievance among many that the Bengal sepoys began to entertain.

Further upsetting the high caste Hindu sepoys of the Bengal Army was the insistence, after November 1856, that sepoys must undertake upon enlistment to serve overseas. They believed that any travel beyond the Kala Pani, literally the Black Water, would destroy their caste.[3] The new regulation was regarded as further evidence that the British intended to annihilate their religion. The presence of missionaries reinforced their fears of an official attempt to convert Hindus and Muslims to Christianity. The British were arrogant in their lack of response to dispel the sepoys' fears.

However, by 1856, both Hindu and Muslim holy men helped to spread the spirit of disaffection amongst the civilian populace, while sepoys passed secret letters inciting members of other regiments to join their brothers in the good fight.[4]

---

3 Sitaram Pandey, From Sepoy to Subedar, being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army, written and related by himself, transl. by Col. Norgate, Lahore, 1873. Reprint Ed. James, London, 1970. p157.

4 This is detailed in any history of the Indian Mutiny. See J.W. Kaye and G.B. Malleson, History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858, 6 Vols., New Edition, London, 1896; T.R.E. Holmes, A History of the Indian Mutiny, London, 1883; and R.C. Majumdar, The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857, Calcutta, 1963.

After Dalhousie annexed the Punjab, the great bulk of British troops allocated to Bengal were concentrated in the Punjab, particularly along the western frontier of Peshawar. In 1856, out of the entire British garrison in India, of 45,000 men, 16,000 were quartered in the Punjab.[5] The cream of British officers were transferred to the newly annexed territory and here, as in Oudh after its annexation, Dalhousie entrusted the forts, magazines, arsenals and treasuries to the sole guardianship of Hindustani troops.[6]

Hindus and Muslims feared for the very existence of their religion. Some sepoys believed the introduction of the new Enfield rifle, whose cartridges were bound in greased paper, using the fat of cows or pigs, was intended deliberately to undermine their religion.

By February 1857 this news reached the 19th Native Infantry at Berhampore, who refused the cartridges, as they would defile the sepoys' caste and they would be regarded as outcasts by their co-religionists. For security reasons the sepoys were marched to Barrackpore and disarmed.

Although incendiary fires began to break out mysteriously in many cantonments in the early months of 1857, and discontent amongst sepoys was by now widespread, the British believed

---

5 Thorburn, Punjab in Peace and War, Edinburgh, 1904, p192.

6 Ibid, p193.

the situation was in control, and would gradually calm down. Even in the Punjab the restlessness of the Bengal Army regulars was noticeable. There too, it was said that faqirs and maulvies were attempting to subvert the soldiers, and letters were circulated around the cantonments, urging the sepoys to mutiny.[7]

At Meerut, the largest station in India, and the strongest in numbers of European troops, the situation had deteriorated to the extent that the sepoys refused to use the hated new cartridges, or even the old cartridges they had used for years.[8] Eighty-five sepoys were arrested, courtmartialled and imprisoned, sparking the mutiny of their fellow soldiers of the 3rd Cavalry, on 10 May, 1857.[9] The sepoys then marched to Delhi before the British officers had gathered their wits to prevent them doing so. In Delhi they seized the fortress and arsenal. The small body of British soldiers in Delhi was not forewarned by the Meerut authorities of the impending danger, and was unable to prevent the mutinous sepoys from forcing their way into the royal palace, where they proclaimed a reluctant Bahadur Shah II, very old and almost blind, King of India. The Meerut mutineers were joined immediately by the 54th Native Infantry.

---

7 K.C. Yadav, The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana, Delhi, 1977. p40.

8 Mutiny Reports from Punjab and North-Western Frontier Province, 2 Vols., Lahore, 1911. [P.M.R.] Vol. I. p2.

9 J. Cave-Browne, The Punjab and Delhi in 1857, 2 Vols. New Delhi, 1858. Reprint 1986. p52.

Other mutineers continued to arrive in Delhi throughout the siege of the city. Delhi became the focus of the revolt to the rebels, and the British in the Punjab also centred their strategies on the city. Delhi was most important, to the rebels and to the British. It was the gateway to the Punjab and the North-Western Frontier Province. He who controlled Delhi had the upper hand in 1857. Delhi became the focus of the revolt to the insurgents. From Delhi the conflagration rapidly engulfed Northern and Central India, with the storm centring on Oudh.

After the Meerut mutineers had captured Delhi, the revolt spread to the Punjab, to the Ferozepur frontier and to the banks of the Sutlej River.[10]

The majority of the 45th Native Infantry, stationed in Ferozepur, mutinied briefly on 14 May, followed by a considerable portion of the 57th Native Infantry. However, the mutinous elements of both regiments were quickly suppressed due to the swift actions of the British.[11] The magazine was ordered to be destroyed to prevent the mutineers from gaining possession of the ammunition, and the remnants of the regiments were marched into the barrack square and disarmed. Within a few days they were disbanded by order of the Punjab government.

---

10 Papers relating to the Mutiny in the Punjab in 1857, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1859. Vol 18.

11 Ibid, p332.

Immediate measures were taken to strengthen the defences of the station, and all ferries were halted to disallow mutinous troops from other stations in the Doab from crossing the Sutlej into the Ferozepur District.[12] Already, the neighbouring districts Bhuttiana and Haryana were in revolt.

General van Cortlandt raised a levy of Sikhs to support the British position in the district. Before the end of May 500 men were in training. The general and his Sikh levy maintained law and order in Ferozepur District, although increasingly depressing news for the British was arriving from Delhi Division. On 17 and 18 June the inhabitants of the city of Ferozepur were disarmed in a bid to contain the populace. Furthermore, in order to preserve the peace of the district and as an example to others, a faqir, Sham Das, who had rebelled against the British, was captured and executed, along with several followers.[13]

After the outbreak of mutiny amongst the 9th Light Cavalry, and the 46th N.I. of the Sialkot, on 9 July, the British considered it no longer safe to leave the army in the hands of any Hindustani regiments in the Punjab. Orders were given to disarm and dismount the 10th Light Cavalry on 11 July.[14]

---

12 P.M.R. Vol I, Narrative of events at Ferozepur during the rebellion, by Captain T.W. Mercer, Assistant Commissioner, 28 January 1858. p52.

13 Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab. Ferozepur District, Lahore 1884. p29.

14 P.M.R. Vol I, Narrative of events at Ferozepur, p54.

However, the 10th broke into mutiny and seized any horses available, and rode off to Delhi on 9 August.[15] They were unsuccessfully pursued.

From Ferozepur mutiny in the Hindustani regiments did not develop from east to west in a planned manner. The next mutiny occurred at Hoti Mardan, in the Peshawar Division, the remotest Division in the Punjab, when the 55th N.I. rose.[16] The rebellious troops fled towards the Swat Hills, from whence they were ejected by the Akhund of Swat because of internal intrigues there.[17] From there they fled to Kashmir, although most perished on the way, or were caught in Kashmir and returned to the British who promptly executed them in a way that hardly seems "civilised" to us today. They were all blown away from guns in front of the entire garrison.[18] Swift and summary punishment was intended by the British to deter further mutinous activity in the Punjab.

With the exception of Delhi, Peshawar Division gave the British the most worry. It was inhabited, throughout the border region,

---

15 Parliamentary Papers, 1859. Vol. 18. p333.

16 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab, to R. Temple, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner for the Punjab, 24 March 1858. p224.

17 Akbar Ahmed, Millenium and Charisma Among Pathans: A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology, London, 1976. p150.

18 R. Bosworth Smith, Life of Lord Lawrence, 2 Vols. London, 1901. Vol I. p531.

by a turbulent and warlike people," similar to those across the border in Afghanistan.[19] The districts of Kohat and Hazara were held by parts of the old Punjab Irregular Force, while the valley of Peshawar was maintained by a strong garrison of the Bengal regular army.

On 21 May, 1857, four out of five Bengal regiments still in the Peshawar cantonment were disarmed, against the protestations of their European officers who believed strongly in their loyalty.[20] Contemporary and early twentieth century British historians maintained the frontier population supported the British in general.[21] In the Punjab Mutiny Report of the Peshawar District, Major E.J. Lake stated that the chiefs and yeomen flocked in, due to the disarming of the sepoys in the area, and were enrolled on the side of the British, thereby helping to preserve the peace on the border at a critical time.[22] However, it is apparent that the hill population, consisting predominantly of a variety of sub-sections of Pathans, and further south of Biloches, was not fully supportive of the

---

19 P.M.R. Vol II. p267.

20 Thorburn, p203.

21 Bosworth Smith, Vol I. p484.

22 P.M.R. Vol I., Report from Major Edward John Lake, Commissioner and Superintendent, Trans-Sutlej States, to Robert Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab, 5 January 1858. p149.

British. But nor were they enamoured of the Hindustanis. Having been under a blockade at the beginning of the mutiny, they quickly saw the benefits of enlisting for service with the British, where they would be well-paid for the sort of activities which appealed to them. The new levies raised in this division were all accustomed to hill warfare. They guarded the ferries on the Indus River, and the main roads of the district, and they captured many deserters and mutineers.[23]

However, the frontier chiefs of Peshawar District, and their subjects, became restless by July. Doubts began to emerge regarding the ultimate success of the British. Landholders and chiefs were reluctant to contribute to the six percent public loan required by the British for war expenditure. Nevertheless, it was accomplished with additional benefits. The people enjoyed seeing the money-lenders have to pay, so they became interested in supporting the British cause.[24] Furthermore, they viewed the British as a better prospect than the far-off Delhi insurgents.[25] By the end of July most border communities, in disgrace mainly due to their plundering

---

23 P.M.R. Vol. II. p289.

24 Ibid., p285.

25 Ahmed, p140.

activities, tendered their submission to the British authorities.

The situation in Jullundur, in the Trans-Sutlej Division, differed from that of other military stations in the Punjab because the military authorities there disregarded the warnings, and the constant incendiary fires, and neglected the opportunity to disarm the troops at an early stage.[26] When the sepoys of the Jullundur Brigade erupted into mutiny on 7 June, the British authorities were completely unprepared for such an eventuality, even though they had heard of the uprisings that had already taken place at other stations. The Trans-Sutlej Division was a strategically important division as supplies and troops from the Punjab proper passed through the region to reach Delhi. There was a strong British presence in the division because it contained the forts of Phillour, Kangra, Nurpur and Brijwara, and the sanitoria of Dharmsala and Dalhousie.[27] It also contained the large Indian state of Kapurthala. The main body of mutineers was joined by the 3rd N.I. at Phillour on 8 June. The Raja of Kapurthala, an independent Sikh price, and his contingent, helped to prevent the mutineers from breaking open the jail, or plundering the treasury.[28] The British had supported the Raja of Kapurthala,

---

26 Ibid, p223.

27 Ibid, Vol I. p141.

28 Parliamentary Papers, 1859. Vol 18. p339.

and the other independent Sikh chiefs against the expansion of Ranjit Singh, and in 1846 and 1848, the Sikh chiefs had aided the British in the Anglo-Sikh wars. The British allowed them to continue to rule their kingdoms or princedoms as autonomous regions. The Raja of Kapurthala was an important and influential leader in the Trans-Sutlej Division, so his support brought with it the support of other leading figures, and large numbers of well-trained troops.[29] The Kapurthala troops were augmented by levies of Daudputras from Leiah and a Sikh regiment raised in Jullundur by the "conquest-tenure jagirdars." These jagirdars had received their jagirs by way of having been actively loyal to the Sikh governments of Ranjit Singh and his successors. These forces helped keep the peace of the district.[30] The action of the military authorities was as weak after the rising as before it. The pursuit of the mutineers was left too late, thereby enabling both groups of mutineers to succeed in attaining their goal, Delhi.

On 25 June John Nicholson carried out the disarming of the 33rd and 35th regiments of Native Infantry at Phillour, in order to prevent further mutinies in the Trans-Sutlej Division.[31] The other two districts that comprised this division, Hoshiorpur

---

29 P.M.R. Vol I, p160.

30 Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab. Jullundur, Lahor 1908. p45.

31 P.M.R. Vol. I. p154.

and Kangra, were tranquil due to early precautionary measures, and nightly patrols.[32] Mixed levies were raised in Kangra District, as each district had to protect itself because the large number of reinforcements sent to Delhi had reduced the garrison of every station.

Jhelum Division was not as strategically important as the Cis-Sutlej Division, nor as politically valuable as the Lahore or Peshawar Divisions. However, the British authorities felt it was imperative to preserve the peace and tranquillity of the region because of its proximity to Kashmir, and because of the large number of restless races who dwelt in the valleys, hills and plains of this division.[33] Many of these people were recruited by the British, who made good use of their martial skills. On 7 July part of the 14th N.I. mutinied. A probable cause was their fear of seeing a force of armed Europeans and Sikhs advancing on them, so they panicked and fled to their lines where they defended themselves.[34]

The mutiny at Sialkot, in the Lahore Division, was of utmost importance to the British as European officers and civilians were murdered. When the Movable Column had been formed, all troops stationed at Sialkot were withdrawn, with the exception

---

32 Parliamentary Papers, 1859. Vol 18. p341.

33 P.M.R. Vol. II. p244.

34 Ibid. p245.

of the 46th N.I. and a wing of the 9th Light Cavalry.[35] The 9th Light Cavalry had heard of the outbreak of the 14th N.I. at Jhelum. The military police detachments who were supposed to back up the British failed to do so because of the Sikh Risaldar of the mounted police, and the Subedar of the infantry police, who encouraged the mutineers to plunder the treasury and set fire to all the documents and records in the district office.[36] The mutineers fled to Delhi, but were pursued by Nicholson and apprehended before they reached their destination. Driven on to an island in the Ravi River by Nicholson's Movable Column, the rebels became hopelessly trapped.[37] After a desperate fight they were annihilated; those who were not shot, with the superior Enfields of the British and their supporters, were drowned.[38]

At Mian Mir, just outside Lahore, the news of the destruction of the mutineers of the 46th N.I. caused the disarmed 26th NI. to be frightened and apprehensive.[39] Prompted more by fear than by mutinous urges, they rose on 30 July, and killed their

---

35 Ibid, p240.

36 Domin, p137.

37 Thorburn, p217.

38 Frederick Cooper, The Crisis in the Punjab from 10th May 1857 until Fall of Delhi, London. 1858. p147.

39 Thorburn, p217.

European officers. Then the entire regiment fled into open country whence they were pursued and, ultimately, killed.

The Lahore Division was extremely important to the British as it contained the religious and political capitals, Amritsar and Lahore, which were also the two largest commercial cities of the province. This division was the heart-land of the Sikhs. They owned 75 per cent of the total area of Amritsar, while Muslims owned 25 per cent.[40] The population of the Lahore Division was 33 per cent of the entire population of the Punjab. As a good proportion of the inhabitants were Sikhs, the British were interested in winning over this community, with favours and concessions before the outbreak of mutiny, and, during the uprising, by continuing to utilise it as a recruiting ground for the armed forces (as Ranjit Singh's administration had done). The Sikh Jats of the Manjha, or upper portion of the Bari Doab, had formed the flower of the Sikh armies and these well-trained and capable soldiers were admired also by the British.[41] The stalwart Sikhs of the Manjha "were wholly on the British side throughout" the uprising.[42] Some mutineers who had managed to escape from Mian Mir were seized by villagers of the Manjha.

---

40 Ian Talbot, Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947, Baltimore. 1988. p20.

41 Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab. Amritsar District, Lahore. 1884. p28.

42 Parliamentary Papers, 1859. Vol. 18. p343.

Leiah Division was completely calm throughout the crisis, except for a small, isolated incident in Main Wali in the District of Dera Ismail Khan. On 22 September a small portion of the 9th Irregular Cavalry mutinied and then fled.[43] However, this was a minor matter, and the body of the 9th remained trustworthy.

In the Kangarh District of Leiah the British authorities took immediate precautionary measures to forestall any rebellion, when civilian insurrection erupted in the neighbouring division of Multan.

Civilian Rebellion

When the British were seen by Sikhs and other Punjabis, to be weakened after four months of desperate fighting before Delhi, many civilians took advantage of the situation.

Two major insurrections took place in the Punjab, when the people believed British rule was at an end. The first took place at Murri, the hill station in the Jhelum Division, on 2 September, and the other occurred at Gugera, in the Multan Division, from 17 September until the end of October. Both these insurrections were staged by Muslims, and were based more on local and traditional conflicts than on a real desire to take on the British, and replace them with an elderly Muslim king.

---

43 P.M.R. Vol. II. p287.

The unrest at Murri was suppressed swiftly by the British. The uprising which took place at Gugera spread throughout the district but not beyond the district, and did not include all of the district's inhabitants.[44]

Delhi was retaken by the British on 20 September, thereby withholding any assistance the Southern Bar rebels had expected. The last of the rebels were finally suppressed by the end of October. Both insurrections were limited-scale operations and took place in comparatively isolated areas. Neither of these civilian insurrections involved any Sikh elements. There were, for reasons we shall discover, no major organised Sikh civilian uprisings in the Punjab.[45] However, it would be fair to state that, had the British failed to take Delhi when they did, many sections of the Sikh panth might have risen against them in their weakened state.

---

44 Andrew Major, Unpublished Ph.D thesis, "Punjab Society and the British 1839-1858." Australian National University 1981. p11-12. The Upera got [who headed the insurgents] and the Lakhera got, both of whom belonged to the great Ravi tribe of Kharrals, had been involved in a bitter feud for some time. They, in turn, opposed the Sial Rajputs of Jhang. Denzil Ibbetson, Punjab Castes, Delhi. 1916. Reprint, New Delhi, 1974. pp174-75. The Lakhera got of Kharrals, along with the Sials and the Langrials of the Multan District, actively collaborated with the British, in an essentially local revenge-inspired goal. Major, p11.

45 However, there were Sikhs among the rebels, especially in the city of Delhi, and outside the Punjab.

There were no more instances of mutiny or civilian rebellion in the Punjab after October of 1857. Delhi was in the hands of the British, whose power and prestige were fully restored. Since the British had proved themselves, and had emerged the victor, Punjabis, particularly Sikhs, including those awaiting the outcome, clamoured to enlist in the service of the British. Now the British could turn all their attention to putting down rebellion wherever it existed throughout Northern and Central India.

This chapter has endeavoured to sketch the main outlines of the revolt of 1857 as it affected the Punjab. Before we begin an analysis of these events, and in particular the Sikh role in them, it is necessary to consider a vital question which we have left untouched. To whom, exactly, are we referring when we speak of "the Sikhs"? An answer to this question will involve a brief excursus into the history of Sikhism in the centuries preceding 1857.

3. SIKHS AND SIKHISM

When endeavouring to ascertain the actions and reactions of a group of people to a particular event, or series of events, one must first of all define that group of people. This poses numerous difficulties with regard to Sikhs because there are significant divisions within the Sikh Panth,[1] and because of the changes the Panth has undergone since its inception.

At no time were Sikhs a clearly definable, monolithic group. Nor are the categories within the Sikh Panth easily definable. The fundamental issue of definition is further confused by the term "Sikhism," which is often used to describe the Khalsa as the essential form of the Sikh tradition. For others, the term is used to describe a broader identity which includes the earlier centuries of Sikh development, often referred to as the Nanak-panth, after Guru Nanak.

But there were further sub-divisions besides Khalsa and non-Khalsa. There also exist those who observe much of the Khalsa discipline without formally taking initiation, and yet others who are able to be defined as neither Sikh nor Hindu, and those who observe the Khalsa tradition but cut their hair.[2]

---

1 The term Panth will be used here, as there is no suitable English translation. Panth means community, or path or way.

2 W.H. McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, The Problem of Sikh Identity, Oxford, 1980. p5.

These differentiations are inevitable in a vital religion, which has had to adapt to changing conditions, such as Mughal persecution.

A popular Sikh calendar displays at a glance the religious origins, and symbolically presents alterations in direction that occurred during the leadership of the ten personal Gurus. Further changes took place after the death of the tenth Guru.

The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, sits cross-legged at the top of the calendar, a halo above him to signify his holy nature He is the largest figure on the calendar, denoting his particular importance. The next four Gurus stand beneath him, a little smaller in stature. These four Gurus continued Nanak's teachings, and were peaceful as was Nanak. Underneath stand four more Gurus, who represent a change in direction, for they did not continue the message of peace. The sixth Guru, Hargovind, was a warrior and is shown with a quiver of arrows on his back. These Gurus, and their followers, were persecuted by the Mughals for their religious convictions. At the bottom of the calendar stands a solitary Guru, the tenth and last, Guru Gobind Singh. As he declared there would be no more Gurus, because all Sikhs are Gurus,[3] there follows at the very bottom the most important

---

3 Gobind Singh's sons predeceased him, so he had no successor on whom to pass the Guruship. Although the first Gurus were appointed, the Guru line descended through - inheritance with the last four. W.H. McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition, Oxford, 1980. p4.

Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib, also known as the Adi Granth, the Eternal Guru, the Holy Book of Sikhdom.[4]

As in other religions, great consequence is placed on the foundations of their religion by Sikhs, more particularly perhaps as Sikhs comprise a minority of the demographic make-up of the Punjab, even in the Sikh heartland, the Manjha.

The Sikh Religion: Its Origins and Its Changes

The Sikh faith was founded by Baba Nanak, about 1500. Born into an orthodox Khatri family in Lahore District, he had not intended to found a new religion separate from Hinduism, but merely to reform it, and to put a different emphasis on it. When he died in 1539 Nanak bequeathed to the next appointed Guru a host of teachings in the form of beautiful religious poems and hymns.[5] These scriptures were later collated by the fifth Guru, together with the teachings of other Gurus, into the Granth Sahib. Nanak's reforms were not social or political, but laid a broad base of religious and moral purity for his numerous band of disciples to follow.

Guru Nanak accepted such important Hindu doctrines as trans-migration of souls, and the law of karma, but he rejected idol worship and preached that there exists only one God, not a multiplicity as in popular Hinduism. Although commonly

---

4 Robin Jeffrey, What's Happening to India?, New York, 1986. p53.

5 W.H. McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, Manchester University Press, 1984. p1.

it has been held that Sikhism is a blend of Hindu and Muslim beliefs, it was, however, a departure from the two. Affinities with Sufi concepts, more particularly, rather than with Islam in general, were apparent, but these were, at most, of little import. Although monotheism and the omnipresence of God would appear to have derived from the Sufism of Guru Nanak's day these doctrines were also a characteristic of Sant belief. Some of Guru Nanak's teachings were in direct conflict with those of the Sufis, such as his acceptance of the doctrine of karma and transmigration.[6]

For Guru Nanak "conventional Hindu belief and Islam were not regarded as fundamentally right but as fundamentally wrong. The two were to be rejected..... True religion lay beyond these two systems." [7]

Unlike followers of Islam, Nanak believed in rebirth. He taught that salvation lay in escaping the cycle of birth and rebirth, and becoming one with the creator. To achieve salvation Nanak emphasised the need for internal meditation. The worldly problem of the cycle of transmigration could be answered by focussing on the divine Name, or nam. Only in practising nam simaran, "remembrance of the Name," is one able to receive the truth from Akal Purakh, the Creator and Sustainer.[8] Yet

---

6 W.H. McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, Oxford, 1968. p159.

7 Ibid, p161.

8 McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, pp8-9.

Nanak was no ascetic, as he held that men and women must continue to live normal lives. A disciplined worldliness was the way to liberation of the soul. Accordingly, he stressed the desire for "piety and practical activity;"[9] appropriate virtues for the Punjab of the nineteenth century as much as for that of the sixteenth century.

All exterior forms of religion, rituals, ceremonies, sacred languages and the ubiquitous distinctions were to be rejected by Guru Nanak, as they had been by the Sants of Northern India. The Sant religion was a synthesis of three main religious movements which had dissented from the mainstream religious beliefs of Hindus and Muslims,[10] although Muslim beliefs had at most a marginal influence.[11] The Sants regarded all outward acts of piety as worthless, and so differed from the large Bhakti tradition with which it is often identified, and from Nath doctrine, which advocated the practice of hatha-yoga and stressed austerity. The Sants' devotion was an interior one which rejected withdrawal from the world. Guru Nanak inherited this Sant tradition, which rejected both Hindu and Muslim sectarian notions as incorrect and ultimately futile, and expanded and re-interpreted it according to his own personality and experience. Nanak's hymns, or bani, present a sophisticated doctrine, more far-reaching and compelling .

---

9 McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p231.

10 Ibid, pp152-3.

11 W.H. McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, London,1976. p6.

than the simple message of the Sants, and yet accessible to all. Nanak's bani have survived as a living faith, as valid in 1857 as in 1500.[12] The greatness of Guru Nanak lay in his ability to "integrate a disparate set of doctrines, and to express them with clarity and beauty."[13] The first Guru's followers continued his pattern of devotion and instruction.

His nine successors, known by the title Guru, each contributed to the development of the new faith.[14] The third Guru, Amar Das, preserved the infant Panth from declining into a sect of quietists and ascetics. He introduced the manji system of supervision, from which it is widely accepted, the masand system later developed.[15] This system of deputies, who were authorised to act on the Guru's behalf, was intended to cope with the increasing numbers in the Panth.

In accordance with Nanak's teachings, regarding caste distinctions, Amar Das institutionalised the compulsory practice of inter-dining, when assembled at a dharam-sala or gurdwara.[16]

Guru Arjan, the fifth successor to Nanak, was more of an administrator than his predecessors. It was he who collected

---

12 W.H. McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p161.

13 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p7.

14 Talbot, p29.

15 McLeod, Who is a Sikh? p12.

16 McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p210.

and arranged their writings, as he was a settled man unlike the previous Gurus and disciples who had wandered throughout Northern India, preaching what they understood of their religion. Guru Arjan gave his increasing numbers of followers a civil organisation and a written rule of conduct. The compilation by Arjan of Nanak's works, the writings of the intermediary Gurus, and Arjan's own prolific contributions, were completed in 1604, and formed the Sikh scriptures, the Adi Granth.

Ritual and administrative measures taken by these early Gurus ensured the continuing existence of the Nanak-panth, and enabled it to withstand the changes it was to experience.

For the first hundred years Sikhism embodied peace and meditation, as eloquently displayed in the modern Sikh calendar.[17] These were relatively placid years, mainly in the reign of the greatest of the Mughal emperors, Akbar, 1542-1605, famous for his religious tolerance. However, during the seventeenth century external influences began to make inroads, eventually resulting in a greatly altered Panth. Such developments add to the difficulty of identifying Sikhs.

Following Akbar's death the Panth encountered mounting Muslim persecution. In tune with the turbulent times in which he and subsequent Gurus, lived, the sixth Guru, Hargobind, was more a martial leader than religious reformer. The militancy

---

17 Jeffrey, p52.

of the Panth at this time was also due to the growing predominance of Jats who retained their cultural attributes of uncut hair, and skill at husbandry, as well as skilled horsemanship and martial prowess.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last personal Guru, bestowed upon his disciples a distinct political existence, and inspired them with the desire to be socially free and nationally independent. He had inherited a double mission, to free his people from the oppressive bigotry of Mughal rule under the Emperor Aurangzeb, and to arrange the death of his father, the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur, on the orders of Aurangzeb, in 1675. Under the leadership of Gobind Singh commenced the long struggle between the Cis-Sutlej Sikhs and the Muslim governors of Sirhind, a part of the Aurangzeb's persecution of the new religion. In Sirhind, Gobind Singh's wife and children were murdered about 1700,[18] seven years before the death of Aurangzeb, and a year after that,in 1708, Guru Gobind Singh was assassinated.

Before he died Gobind Singh had already established the institutions which would keep the religion alive and protect Sikhs; he declared the line of personal Gurus ended, the functions of the Guru to be vested jointly in the community

---

18 Ludhiana District Gazetteer, p21.

of believers and the scriptures,[19] and he formally founded the Khalsa, initiating the most significant change in direction.

In this atmosphere of violence and religious fanatacism Gobind Singh transformed the Panth from a passive sect into a militant brotherhood with a common objective, that of resisting Muslim domination and persecution. He named this the Khalsa, literally meaning pure, but also signifying the liberated or chosen people.[20] The enthronement by Gobind Singh of the Adi Granth as the Eternal Guru was also a reaction against Muslim persecution, and was intended to thwart enemies who endeavoured to subvert the religion by installing a puppet Guru, or by using other devious methods to gain control of the Sikh minions.

In forming the Khalsa, Gobind Singh successfully fused a military discipline onto a religious foundation.[21] He found it necessary to institute a disciplined order to overcome internal administrative problems. The Guru needed to terminate the power of the regional supervisers, or masands, who administered pastoral matters and tithe collection, as the Panth increased in number. Because the Guru therefore required

---

19 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p16. The formation of the Khalsa and the termination of the line of Gurus are also detailed in Kushwant Singh, A History of the Sikhs, 2 Vols., Princeton University Press, 1966. Vol. I, pp82-86.

20 Amritsar District Gazetteer, p16.

21 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p4.

assistance the system was introduced whereby the Sikhs who remained under the direct supervision of the Guru were collectively known as Khalsa, and the remainder were entrusted to the masands.[22] While this had worked satisfactorily for some years, by the time of the tenth Guru, many masands had become corrupt, and were overstepping their authority. So Gobind Singh removed them and brought all Sikhs under his direct guardianship.

On the traditional Baisakhi Day of 1699 Guru Gobind Singh inaugurated the Khalsa. He introduced the concept of the five Ks, or panj kakke, and a distinctive style of initiation into the Khalsa. All who accepted this initiation, which took the form of a baptism ceremony, had to swear allegiance to a specific code of behaviour.[23] This mass baptism called the pahul, was a symbolic ritual, which included the sharing of a mixture of sugar and water stirred with a double-edged sword, to denote both the egalitarian and the military character of Khalsa Sikhism.[24] Only after he had undergone pahul initiation could a Sikh bear the title Singh, meaning lion. The baptised Guru Gobind took the name Singh, stressing the martial aspects of the Khalsa.

---

22 McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikkhism, p71.

23 Ibid.

24 Talbot, p31; McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, pp14-16.

Those Sikhs who had been initiated into the Khalsa were known as amrit-dhari, Sikhs who had taken amrit. They were required to maintain a particular outward appearance, certain social obligations, and ritual observances. This code of conduct was known as Rahit, and its records are rahit-namas.[25] Another term, which was frequently synonymous with amrit-dhari, was kes-dhari, or one who has uncut hair.[26] However, there were numerous Sikhs with uncut hair who were not initiated members of the Khalsa. Kes-dhari Sikhs comprised a large section of the Panth. A third group who revered the Gurus and practised nam simaran, but did not become initiated into the Khalsa, were known as Sahaj-dhari Sikhs.[27] Applied during the eighteenth century, sahaj refers to the term Guru Nanak used to describe the state of ultimate bliss achieved through the practice of nam simaran.[28] Sahaj-dhari Sikhs generally originated from the Khatri/Arora section of the Panth. Further confusing the issue of defining Sikhs, Khatris and Aroras who cut their hair or smoked[29] may be identified as Sikhs or

---

25 McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, p73.

26 Fox, p27.

27 McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, p153.

28 McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, p45

29 These acts were considered antipathetic to the Khalsa Panth. The smoking of a hookah was regarded as a Muslim practice, and as such was to be forbidden. This prohibition came to include all smoking. Ibid., pp32-3.

Hindus, or even as both.[30] Unlike Khalsa Sikhs, Sahaj-dhari Sikhs were not visibly distinguishable from their Hindu neighbours. They remained loyal to Nanak-panth concepts and, while they regarded themselves as Sikhs, their identity was more obscure than that of baptised Sikhs.[31]

From the outset Gobind Singh intended the Khalsa to be an outwardly distinctive order. The importance of visible identity was emphasised, making it no longer possible to be anonymous or hidden. This set Khalsa Sikhs apart from Hindu society, and united the Khalsa Panth in their common code and goals. Five symbols were to be worn or carried by the Panth, the so-called five Ks, or panj kakke. They are: Kes, to wear the hair and beard uncut: kangha, to carry a wooden comb: kach, to wear shorts, which was part of a contemporary soldier's attire; kara, to wear a steel bangle; and kirpan, to carry a sword, or dagger.[32] These items left no doubt regarding the military aspects of the Khalsa, three of which, kach, kara and kirpan, were part of a soldier's equipment.

The five Ks also reflect the customs of the largest section of the Panth, that is Jats. Jat customs and cultural patterns produced many features now exclusively associated with the

---

30 Ibid, p112.

31 Ibid, p45.

32 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, pp51-2.

Khalsa Panth. Uncut hair was a Jat custom, which had been observed by Hindu and Muslim Jats also. The bearing of arms, represented by carrying a knife or a dagger, was a Jat custom as well.[33]

The name Sikh means learner, thus indicating the nature of Guru Nanak's religious instruction. The ten Gurus were Khatris, of a merchant caste, and all resided in villages in Central Punjab. These villages contained a large proportion of Jats. The cast origins of the Gurus, and their rural homes, were significant in the development of their following.[34] From early on the followers of the Gurus were Jats to a great degree, so the Sikh leadership was from the mercantile community while the following was from the agrarian community.[35] Khatris traditionally filled the role of teachers of Jats.

During the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Jats gained a preponderance in the Panth, that increased after the founding of the Khalsa. The Jat custom of wearing the hair uncut and their militant traditions coincided with the aims of Gobind Singh, and became important features of the Khalsa doctrine.

---

33 Ibid.

34 McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition, p4.

35 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p 9.

The Gurus had taught that hard work and enterprise were as necessary for salvation as meditation and prayer. This held great appeal for industrious Jats.[36] The Jats of the Punjab originated from a pastoral people, whose outstanding characteristic was an "absence of social, or economic, stratification."[37] As they moved from Sind through Multan into the Punjab they changed from pastoralists to peasant cultivators. Thence, they advanced economically, and gained political supremacy. However, this did not lead them to assert claims to Khatri status. This was due to the egalitarian message of Sikhism. Furthermore, such claims would have been inimical to husbandry and to the development of thrift.[38] As a rule, Sikh Jats stayed out of the hands of the banias, or Hindu money-lenders. Any land transferred was for convenience, or to raise money from investment in trade, or sometimes for unproductive purposes such as marriage ceremonies. Most of the alienated land remained within the community.[39]

---

36 Singh, Vol I, p58.

37 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p11.

38 Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition, p79.

39 Ibid.

The Gurus' rejection of caste status was significant in attracting Jats, with their egalitarian tradition, to the Panth.[40] However, caste distinctions infiltrated the Panth, despite the promotion of equality as a basic premise of the Sikh religion:[41] "Together they (the Khalsa) would constitute a single caste, all eating from the same vessel and all united in the same resolve."[42] The anticaste emphasis referred to access to spiritual deliverance, and to the sangats, or congregations. The convention introduced by the third Guru, that required members of a sangat, regardless of caste or gender, to dine together at the dharam-sala or gurdwara, was called the langar.[43] This was intended to prevent caste being recognised in the gurdwaras. However, in practice, in everyday life, the complete removal of caste identity was not demanded, nor adhered to. Within the Panth caste continued to be recognised for such traditional purposes as marriage alliances and family affiliations and was significantly influential in the political life of the Panth.[44] The major caste categories represented in the Panth were those prevalent

---

41 Fox, p27.

42 McLeod, Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism, pp71f.

43 McLeod, Who is a Sikh., p13.

44 Ibid, pp109-10.

in rural Punjab.[45] Jats made up the largest section, having predominated since the early years of the Gurus. The other caste divisions were the clerical and commercial castes, the Aroras and Khatris, and the artisan castes, such as Ramgarhias, or carpenters. Those occupying the lowest status were the ex-Untouchables or Harijans, sometimes called Mazhbi Sikhs. Caste cut across religious boundaries, for, though Sikh Jats seldom married Hindu Jats, the other three categories of Sikhs did intermarry Hindus of the same caste.[46]

This adherence to traditional caste status tends to undermine any efforts to determine a Sikh identity. Hindu members of the same caste often looked upon their Sikh counterparts as "Hindus who have joined a political association."[47] Guru Gobind Singh's efforts to obliterate caste distinctions were no more successful than his predecessors'.

Further divisions occurred within the Panth, if one includes an assortment of splinter groups and sects who claimed descent from Guru Nanak's elder son, Siri Chand,[48] Akalis and Shahids, both especially enthusiastic Khalsas, and Nirmalas, an order

---

45 McLeod, Early Sikh Tradition, pp257-8.

46 Jeffrey, p48.

47 McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, p60.

48 Ibid, p46.

of scholar Sikhs.[49] Doubtful recruits included the Nirankaris and the Namdharis, who preached respectively a return to pure Nanak-panthi principles, and a reinvigorated and rejuvenated Khalsa.[50]

With the termination of the line of personal Gurus, the function of the Guru was vested in the Adi Granth, which became a channel of communication between God and man, and the Panth. These modifications did not signify a departure from, but more a supplement to, Guru Nanak's teachings which continued to be the substance of Sikh belief and bound together the comparatively small community.[51] The tenets of the Khalsa, in the form of rahit namas, were consolidated during the eighteenth century. Many European observers regarded all Sikhs as Khalsa Sikhs, seemingly ignorant of the existence of other Sikhs, due to the wearing of the Khalsa Symbols.[52] By the early nineteenth century, another European observer, John Malcolm[53] reinforced

---

49 Ibid, p60.

50 Ibid, p65.

51 McLeod, Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion, p163, Sikhs comprised just 14 per cent of the population of the Punjab by 1850. Even in the heartland of Lahore, Amritsar and Ludhiana Sikhs still formed only a minority. Talbot, p32.

52 See Ganda Singh (Ed.), Early European Accounts of the Sikhs, Calcutta, 1962, for a collection of reports by these eighteenth century observers, McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, p57.

53 John Malcolm, "Sketch of the Sikhs," Asiatick Researchers XI, Calcutta, 1810; quoted by McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, pp58-60.

the views of his predecessors, acknowledging the ascendance of the Khalsa Sikhs, in the Panth. But, he also noted the existence of Sahaj-dhari Sikhs, whom he called Khalsa Sikhs.[54] During the 1840s Joseph Cunningham had firsthand experience of the Sikhs. In his work on Sikh history he stressed the predominance of the Khalsa identity amongst Sikhs, and wrote that there was an obvious distinction between Sikhs and Hindus, referring to the outwardly visible Khalsa Sikhs.[55]

Throughout the eighteenth century the Panth continued to gain in strength as the Mughal Empire was on the wane, and the Punjab endured invasions by Persians and Afghans. After Gobind Singh's death, as no descendant successor was available, Banda Bahadur, no relation to Gobind, was the dominant choice because of his early successes against the Mughal rulers in the Punjab. During the widespread rural unrest that accompanied the waning of Mughal power Banda Bahadur emerged as the new Sikh leader. But he was executed in 1716, and the leadership was inherited by the Panth and the Eternal Guru, the Adi Granth. The Afghan invasions finally eliminated Mughal rule in the Punjab. In 1764 the holy temple of Amritsar was rebuilt, having been razed by Ahmad Shah. The Akali Sikhs appointed themselves the armed guardians of the Golden Temple at Amritsar, the heart of Sikhdom.[56] They adopted arms as their profession and, under

---

54 McLeod, Who is a Sikh?, p60.

55 Cunningham, pp84-5.

56 Amritsar District Gazatteer, p17.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the "lion of the Punjab," who built and ruled a vast kingdom from 1801-1839, they formed a prominent section of his very capable army.

Ahmad Shah helped to prepare the way for the establishment of Sikh authority. The tough, flexible military organisations known as misls grew out of this period of anarchy in the eighteenth century. These independent groups of Sikhs were bound in a flexible confederation by their rural origins, by the bonds of common religious affiliation, and by their opposition to a common enemy.[57]

These armed confederacies took advantage of the power vacuum to carve out petty states for themselves. The Phulkian Sikhs[58] and other chiefs began to establish kingdoms from the ruins of the Mughal Empire.[59] The House of Patiala, and other small kingdoms, were founded at this time, many of which remained independent territories under the protection of the British, during Ranjit Singh's rule, and after the annexation of the Punjab.

In theory there were twelve misls, each covering a different region of the Punjab and subordinate, except one, to the central

---

57 Ibid, p6.

58 The Phulkian Sikhs established themselves in the Cis-Sutlej States.

59 Ludhiana District Gazetteer, p22.

authority of Dal Khalsa.[60] In practice the organisation of misls was much more adaptable than this. Internecine warfare eruped amongst the misls once the immediate threat posed by the Afghan invaders, who had replaced the Mughals as the common foe, was not so urgent.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh

The advent of the "one-eyed lion" of the Punjab, Ranjit Singh, brought an end to the feuding among the misls by establishing a powerful if short-lived monarchy. At the tender age of fifteen he became leader of the Shukerchakia misl, and, to reinforce this position, he married twice into the family of Jai Singh Kanaihya in the Upper Bari Doab, and into the family of Kamar Singh Nakkai in southern Lahore. Already he had been advantaged by his father who had left him a large area of well-administered land, from mid Rechna to mid Sind Saugar Doabs, and 5,000 well-armed, mounted cavalry.[61] Gradually Ranjit Singh united the opposing Sikh factions and pacified the Punjab. While he was still a very young man he established the Kingdom of Lahore in 1801, creating a vast Sikh empire from this political base situated in the region's central tracts. Known to Sikhs as the Manjha, this region also contained the religious heart of the Sikh

---

60 Jeffrey, p60.

61 J.S. Grewal, New Cambridge History of India, The Sikhs of the Punjab, Cambridge University Press, 1990. p100.

kingdom, Amritsar. Commanded by the famed fortress of Govindgarh, the city of Amritsar houses the most holy of places of worship for Sikhs, the Golden Temple.[62] By the time Ranjit Singh died in 1839 his empire extended from Peshawar to the River Sutlej, and from Kashmir almost as far as Sind.

In 1809, Ranjit Singh a treaty with the British at Amritsar in which he agreed to concede the River Sutlej as the border between his Sikh empire and the Cis-Sutlej states, whose Sikh rulers resisted Ranjit and had thence requested British protection against attack by his formidable army. The East India Company established a cantonment at Ludhiana following the signing of the treaty, and Ranjit Singh remained a friend and ally of the British. Hereafter, the Sikh chiefs of the independent states, and the other Cis-Sutlej chiefs, actively supported the British, including throughout the crisis in 1857.[63]

Ranjit consolidated his power, by his own ingenious tactics, although seemingly arbitrary and often cruel by British standards, and by the strategic use of his army, whose soldiers were well-disciplined and obtained by voluntary enlistment.[64]

Under Ranjit Singh's rule every Sikh, Khalsa or otherwise, enjoyed all the privileges of Khalsa citizenship, including

---

62 Parliamentary Papers, 1859. Vol. 18. p345.

63 Domin, p118.

64 Thorburn, p22.

exemption from taxation. However, he was careful not to offend Muslim and Hindu subjects. Much admired by Sikhs, Ranjit made the Sikhs, with a population of barely half a million, into one of the strongest and most powerful states in India. Yet he had established no schools, courts nor jails, for his methods were more personal and direct, nor were any public utility works carried out during his reign.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was held in such high regard by the Sikh Panth that, even after his demise, they were influenced by his loyalties, particularly his alliance with the British. Throughout his reign Ranjit Singh had been a friend and ally of the British. His kingdom was regarded as the fulfilment of the Khalsa ideal. Beliefs, which were in opposition to the teachings of the Gurus, had surfaced in the Panth, but did nothing to undermine its strength and unity.[65]

Due to the efficient use of his highly disciplined army, Ranjit was extremely successful in all his battles. The real strength of his armed forces lay in its infantry and artillery, both groups being trained by Rohilla Afghans in the service of Ranjit Singh. These troops, well-turned out, excellent horsemen, and displaying the Khalsa insignia, presented the public face of the Khalsa. This was so much so that many observers believed all Sikhs to be of his dominant group. Impressions of Sikhs

---

65 McLeod, The Evolution of the Sikh Community, p54.

given in the reports written by Europeans in the first part of the nineteenth century were based on sightings of these well-trained units.

Ranjit Singh began employing European officers in the 1820s. Towards the end of his reign nearly half of his army, which included a large number of non-Sikh Punjabis, was trained according to European methods.[66]

Ranjit had given his personal attention to revenue administration and trade in his extensive dominions. He revived prosperity in the Punjab, and extended state patronage to all the important sections of the population. Sikhs formed the dominant element in the ruling class, and had the largest share in jagirs assigned by Ranjit and his successors.[67] Hindus and Muslims came to form a substantial section of the ruling class also. Sikhs received a much larger share of revenue-free land, but not at the expense of Hindus or Muslims.[68] Nevertheless, a vestige of the eighteenth century hostility towards Muslims remained.

---

66 Grewal, p104.

67 It is likely that, during the settled times throughout Ranjit Singh's rule, and up until the Anglo-Sikh wars, when Sikh dominion was powerful and extensive, many Non-Khalsa Sikhs took to displaying the outward symbols of the Khalsa. This was a golden era in Sikh history, and a time for all Sikhs to be proud. Persecution had been replaced by privilege. However, not all Sikhs were content with the dominance of Khalsa Panth. Two sects, discussed briefly earlier in this chapter, the Nirankaris and the Namdharis, originated during Ranjit's rule. McLeod, Who is a Sikh? pp62-3.

68 Grewal, p99.

After Maharaja Ranjit Singh

After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, the Punjab again deteriorated into a fierce scramble for power. The court at Lahore became divided, the power play at the top brought in the fractious nobility, and the court could not prevent the Sikh army from clamouring for war with the British, who were pressing against the Punjab's borders.

Even the squabbles which developed within the Khalsa following the death of Ranjit did not immediately affect the Panth's sense of identity.

War broke out between the formidable Sikh army and the British in 1846. After the defeat of the Sikhs, the East India Company's armyadvanced the Punjab's frontier from the Sutlej to the Beas River, and the British occupied Lahore where a British Resident was established, but the Punjab proper was not annexed.

The Second Anglo-Sikh war of 1848-49 stemmed from the reluctance of the British to annex the Punjab. However, after the decisive defeat of the Sikh army in 1849 the British annexed the entire province.[69] The British had been impressed by the formidable strength of the opposition of the Sikh army. The martial prowess of their enemy fitted well with the current British theory of martial races.

---

[69] Sitaram, p156.

Several decades of relative peace under the auspices of Ranjit Singh resulted in an increase of population, which placed extra pressure on the fertile plains. The disbandment of the Khalsa further aggravated the situation. The British annexation of the province proved a shattering blow for the Sikh community on the whole, especially for the former Khalsa soldiers, who now found themselves unemployed. The British did not induct Sikhs, Khalsa or otherwise, into the Indian Army until 1851. Even then they were slow to join up, mainly because of the bigoted attitude of high caste Hindus in the armed forces, and because of the suspicious and unwilling stance of the British officers themselves. Former Khalsa soldiers were not trusted enough to be enlisted into the regular army until late 1857, when the British needed all the support they could get when bogged down before Delhi.

Under the leadership of Maharaja Ranjit Singh the Khalsa had attained great standing. But political success and material prosperity led to a weakening of Sikh traditions, predominantly of Khalsa rituals and customs, and a subsequent blurring of differentiation between Hindus and some Sikhs. After annexation this situation had developed sufficiently to undermine the position of strength previously held. Furthermore,

under British rule it confused divisions between Sikhs and Hindus for the purpose of policy making.[70]

---

70 In census reports, which didn't start till 1871-72, Sikhs often were returned as Hindus. Frequently historians have concluded from this that Sikhs were not a homogeneous group, bound together by their religion and history, but were, in fact a Hindu sect, until the 1880s when there was a flowering of Sikh restoration. However, this concept is, at the least, questionable. During Ranjit Singh's rule, Sikhs, especially Sikh Jats, were the most privileged section of the community. After annexation the British were at pains to uphold this situation for the majority of the Sikh panth, with the exclusion of the ex-Khalsa soldiers. More detail, regarding the situation the former Khalsa soldiers found themselves in, follows in Chapter 5.

4. LAND ISSUES

Geographical Features

The Punjab was a predominantly rural province, pastoral and agricultural, so land fertility, levels of rainfall, climatic factors and experimentation with crops were important.

The Punjab covers such a vast area that it accommodates a variety of terrain types. In the mountainous areas of the north-east, which include the Kangra and Simla regions, monsoon rain fell abundantly, also watering the sub-montaine areas of Sialkot, Gurdaspur, Hoshiarpur and Ambala.[1] This enabled rich crops of sugar-cane, cotton and wheat to be grown. These densely populated areas had few large landowners.

The Central Plains of Jullundur, Amritsar, Lahore and Ferozepur also received large amounts of rain. Ferozepur, the furthest south of these districts, was the driest in this part of the Punjab. It consisted mainly of scrub and semi-desert, and urgently required the less random benefits of canal irrigation. It would receive such irrigation when the Bari Doab and the Sirhind Canals were completed in 1861 and 1889 respectively. Meanwhile wells and inundation canals supplemented the rainfall. This region was heavily populated and cultivated in small parcels of land.[2]

---

1 Ian Talbot, Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947, Baltimore. 1988. p11.

2 Ibid, p13.

To the south-east and south-west of the Central Plains, the regions were arid and poor. The south-east contained the barren famine tracts of Rohtak and Hissar.[3] In the south-west the sparsely populated regions of Multan and Jhang received very little rainfall. The fertility of this region depended on inundation canals to a great degree. These canals, which existed throughout the south-west, were empty in winter, and ran with water, fed by the rivers, from April to October when they were much needed.[4] The only alternative method of irrigation in this area was by the use of wells, which were difficult and unsatisfactory. Under both Sikh and British rule attempts had been made to maintain and extend facilities for irrigation. In Multan Sawan Mal, the Sikh ruler after Ranjit Singh, had had the old inundation canals repaired and new ones constructed.[5]

Overall, conditions in the south-west were more conducive to a nomadic and pastoral life than to settled agricultural pursuits.

---

3 These districts were in Haryana which was not strictly part of the Punjab proper. But Haryana and Delhi in particular, were important in the Mutiny, and are therefore included here.

4 General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1854-55 to 1855-56 inclusive. Calcutta, 1856. p39.

5 P.H.M. van den Dungen, Changes in Status and Occupation in Nineteenth Centry Punjab" in D.A. Low, Ed., Soundings in Modern South Asian History, London, 1968. p74.

6 Ibid, p73.

The western region of the Punjab was the most backward in the province, as agriculture was poor, its communications rudimentary and it relied heavily on the navigation of the Indus River.[7] Most of its cultivated area was in the hands of large landowners.

In the Shahpur, Jhelum, Rawalpindi and Attock districts in the north, the Punjab's plains give way to the hills and stony moors of the Salt Range. Although rainfall in this region was adequate, irrigation facilities were poor.[8] The rugged and broken countryside made cultivation difficult. The hill people's meagre income gleaned from such infertile soil was supplemented by military service, first in the Mughal armies, later with the Sikh rulers and then with the British.

Benefits of Irrigation

Under the government of Ranjit Singh considerable progress had been made in extending cultivation by means of artificial irrigation. After annexation of the province the British undertook the continuation of canal construction on a magnified scale. In pursuit of their policy of turning much of the uncultivated area of the Punjab into fertile land supporting viable crops, and thereby generating an appropriate land tax, the British offered loans and advances to cultivators to repair and dig wells and tanks.[9] The First Administration Report

---

7 Talbot, p13.

8 Ibid.

9 Domin, p65.

stated that many villages had accepted the government's offer to intensify cultivation by increasing the irrigation system.[10] Political considerations were uppermost in the minds of the British administrators in this area of extended and improved cultivation.

While the system of inundation canals was dependent upon self-support from the villages, the British Board of Administration and, after 1853, the Chief Commissioner, fully supported the vast undertaking of the Bari Doab Canal, to water the land between the Ravi and the Beas Rivers in which the Manjha was located.[11] The positive economic and political results that would be gained from the completion of this canal were evident. The benefits of the canal, traversing the heart of the Manjha, would, it was hoped, "attach the people to the British government."[12] In post-annexation Punjab an inclination towards Sikhs, often at the expense of other groups, was a feature of British policy. The British had great respect for Sikhs [whom they regarded in general as Khalsa Sikhs] since the two Anglo-Sikh wars. However, while they admired Sikhs' martial prowess, they also were suspicious of them, and did not wish to encourage further unrest amongst Sikh communities. The British authorities

---

10 Ibid, p66.

11 General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, (hereafter P.A.R.) from 1849-50 to 1850-51 inclusive. Calcutta, 1853, p132.

12 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p34.

were interested in creating favourable conditions so that the largest group, Sikh-Jats, would continue to utilise their skill at husbandry and their enterprise to become very successful agriculturists.

With the same political end in mind, while the Bari Doab Canal was still under construction, the Hasli Canal, which also traversed the Manjha, was re-opened, providing the first stimulus to increased production and improved farming practices.[13] Furthermore, the British paid teams of labourers to keep up inundation and perennial canals. Canal, and road construction employed large numbers of Punjabis, especially Mazhbi Sikhs, the so-called Untouchables, considered by many Sikhs as not belonging to the Sikh panth.

Other regions of the province were mainly left to their own devices without assistance from the Provincial government, for the same political aims. Outer districts were neglected in favour of the central districts which were populated by Sikhs, in the main.[14]

Control of the Land

In their efforts to create a viable agricultural economy in the Punjab, the British administrators were aware of the

---

13 P.A.R. 1849-50 to 1850-51, p174; P.A.R. 1854-55 to 1855-56, p61.

14 Domin, p68.

importance of well-constructed roads and railways for the transportation of goods. One of the most significant of these was the Grand Trunk Road, of which the Cis-Siutlej section was metalled and bridged by 1857.[15] The Grand Trunk Road was of great military importance during the Mutiny. Without this road, especially in the rainy season, it would have proved impossible for troops, supplies and siege trains to have reached Delhi.[16]

In addition to improved irrigation, the development of transport facilities, and the application of modern farming methods, the British initiated a land policy that would favour the rural masses. In a predominantly rural province such as the Punjab, the British believed it was imperative to improve the living standards of the peasantry in order to win them over.

Political power in such an overwhelmingly rural society as the Punjab depended on control of the land. The basic principles for a land policy in the Punjab were issued by the

---

15 Ibid, p32.

16 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p23.

Governor General to the Board of Administration[17] on 31 March 1849.[18] They included instructions on how to deal with the various loyal chiefs and jagirdars, they ordered to be forfeited the rent-free tenures of every rebel of the second Anglo-Sikh War, and they recommended that, in order to make use of the traditional local self-governing bodies such as the village communities, they were to be maintained in their integrity. This system of administration, influenced by the British District Officers who had their background in the North-Western Provinces, accorded well with the admonition to respect village coparcenaries.[19]

Based on the principles favoured by John Lawrence, the Mahalwari Settlement, as developed in the North-Western Provinces, was

---

17 The Punjab Board of Administration was initiated in 1849 by Governor-General Dalhousie as an alternative to appointing Henry Lawrence as head of the Provincial government. Dalhousie and Henry Lawrence had opposing views regarding the treatment of the Indian aristocratic classes. The Board comprised three members, the brothers Lawrence, Henry and John, and Charles Mansel, and was a novelty in the administrative history of British India. The basic problem of treatment of the aristocratic classes divided the members of the Board irreconcilably, and it was abolished on 4 February 1853. Henry Lawrence believed the aristocracy should have been supported, and their jagirs, where appropriate, continued in order to cause the least possible upheaval in the transition to British rule whereas John Lawrence favoured appeasement of the masses, as did Dalhousie. John Lawrence was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Punjab after the demise of the Board. Domin, pp30ff; Bosworth Smith, Vol. I, pp2343.ff.

18 Governor-General's Despatch constituting the Board of Administration of 31 March 1849; National Archives of India, Secret Committee, 28 April 1849. No. 73-75, para.7; quoted by Domin p34.

19 Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition, p42.

Based on the principles favoured by John Lawrence, the Mahalwari Settlement, as developed in the North-Western Provinces, was introduced into the Punjab. Under this system a regular settlement comprised two parts:

1. To survey estates, or mahals, and classify soils according to their productiveness.
2. To inquire into property relations and enter them in the records of rights.

The Mahalwari Settlement was considered to be appropriate for those provinces where "for the most part village communities with landlord rights are dealt with; that is to say where the joint body of co-sharers is regarded as the landlord and is responsible for one assessed source of revenue."[20]

These principles were set out in a publication first used in the North-Western Provinces, and issued in the Punjab in 1849, and later Oudh, in 1856, Thomason's Directory for Revenue Officers.[21] For the most part this enabled the village communities and actual cultivators to continue to enjoy the position of strength they had maintained under Sikh rule.

---

20 B.H. Baden-Powell, A Short Account of the Land Revenue and its Administration in British India, Oxford. 1894. p171.

21 Directions for Revenue Officers in the Punjab, Ed., D.G. Barkley, Lahore, 1875, in Thomas and Metcalf , p168.

Revenue officers were to deal directly with the village zamindars or with the proprietary coparcenars, thereby dispensing with the need for middlemen. In the Punjab the actual cultivators typically were also the proprietors.

A characteristic of the village system was the joint liability which was enforced by the British, although under the Sikh government it had been somewhat relaxed. The British viewed the practice of joint responsibility as a safeguard for the punctual payment of the land revenue. This was emphasised in the Administration Report of 1854-56, "Primarily each man cultivates and pays for himself, but ultimately he is responsible for his coparcenars and they for him; and they are bound together by a joint liability."[22] It was intended to serve as a buffer against encroachment from moneylenders, and to prevent the transfer of peasants' land into the hands of auction buyers.[23]

Referring to the North-Western Province, S.B. Chaudhuri places great significance on the role the bania[24] played in fanning

---

22 P.A.R. 1854-55 to 1855-56. p15.

23 Domin, p54.

24 Banias belong to Hindu commercial castes, and were often money-lenders. Mahajans, who also were purchasers of transferred lands, were village or town bankers.

the flames of rebellion.[25] In contemporary accounts moneylenders typically are referred to in derogatory terms, such as "usurious bania," or "sleek mahajan."[26] However, while resentment of the money-lenders certainly existed, there is little support for the theory that this was a prime incentive for popular rural hostility towards the British, who, as enforcers of land transfers through the court process, may have been seen as being in collusion with the banias and mahajans. More recent, detailed study shows that disturbances tended to occur in those areas where the grip of the money-lender was at its weakest.[27] This was the case in the Punjab as well as in the North-Western Provinces, where the populace rose against the banias, and destroyed their hated account books, as in the town of Kamalia, in the Multan Division. There had not been an unusual number of forced land sales for incurred debt to the moneylenders.[28] As a rule Sikh Jats stayed out of the hands of banias. Land transferred was usually for their own convenience, or for such social purposes as marriage ceremonies. Most of this alienated

---

25 S.B. Chaudhuri, Civilian Rebellion in the Mutinies, p21.

26 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p4.

27 Eric Stokes, p165, p175.

28 Cave-Brown, Vol. II. p213.

Most of this alienated land remained within the wider community.[29]

On the eve of rebellion the business of the first regular settlement had been completed in the central districts of the Punjab, where most Sikhs lived. The third Administration Report summarised the settlement proceedings so far, "the cultivators are essentially peasant proprietors. There are no farmers or middlement, and generally no great landlords. As a rule each man owns and fills his own glebe, upon which he pays the revenue and pockets all the profits."[30] This peasant proprietor, almost typically a Sikh Jat, was a feature peculiar to the Punjab. The Sikh peasantry was in a singular position. While only 55 per cent of Punjabis as a whole were earning their livelihood from agriculture, the proportion among Sikhs was 71 per cent, revealing the social background of the Sikhs.[31] More important, however was the high proportion of proprietors among the Sikhs who earned their living from the land. The 1868 Census Report of the Punjab comments on the great discrepancy between numbers of Sikh proprietors and Sikh tenants. Proprietors among Sikhs outnumber tenants 100:23, whereas proportions were much closer among Muslims at 100:61 and Hindus at 100:55[32] Of the

---

29 Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition, p79.

30 P.A.R. 1854-55 to 1855-56. p22.

31 Report on the Census of the Punjab taken on 10 January 1868. Lahore, 1870. p28; quoted in Domin, p49.

32 Ibid.

Punjabi peasantry, 11.7 per cent were Sikh proprietors and 4.7 per cent only Sikh tenants.[33] The Sikh proprietors were concentrated in the ten central districts of the Punjab, the Manjha. However, in the north-western parts of the province, not a single Sikh proprietor had been located.[34]

The British land policy continued the strong position which village communities and actual cultivators had maintained under Sikh rule. By investing landed proprietary rights with the members of the village communities, the British believed themselves to be continuing the policies that were popular with the Sikh panth in general, and Sikh Jats in particular, under Ranjit Singh's government. The privileged position which Sikh Jats, especially had enjoyed under Ranjit's rule, was maintained and strengthened by order of the British court system.[35]

The land revenue settlement was an important aspect of the British land policy. The history of colonial rule in India had proved frequently that a heavy land tax, rigidly enforced, was counter-productive. Over-assessment of a particular property would make ownership of that property an unprofitable undertaking.[36] Many previous land revenue settlements, in the older

---

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Domin, p37.

36 Stokes, p138.

provinces, had proven to have been set at too high a rate, thus inhibiting improvement in the agrarian sector. The North-Western Provinces provided the British in the Punjab with a clear example of how excessive government revenue demands, required in cash rather than kind, contributed to the outcome of forced land sales and social disintegration. For instance, the disastrous results of over-assessment of land tax in Delhi Division caused peasant to flee into neighbouring Sikh states.[37]

A moderate land tax was imperative to create a progressive and prosperous province, profitable for the Directors of the company. So, the summary settlements were reduced further. That the British administrators so readily reduced the land revenue demand tends to corroborate the theory that they did so because of the well-known capacity of Sikh Jats for militant action.[38] In fact, it suited British policy in the Punjab, for they were well aware that over-assessment was ultimately unprofitable. Also, relatively light revenue assessments were offered to encourage former Khalsa soldiers to resettle on the land.

In the Punjab, disintegration of the village communities due to increased indebtedness and the subsequent forced sales of lands, could only develop, as it did in the North-Western Provinces, over a longer period of time, if indeed it would do so at all. Records of sales and transfers for arrears show that, although the number of landholdings alienated increased,

---

37 Imperial Gazetteer of British India : District Series, Punjab. Karnal District, Lahore. 1994. pp220ff.

38 Domin, p61.

it was gradual and, by 1857, as yet a very small number. Furthermore, many of the forced sales did not pass out of the control of the caste group, but merely passed from an individual proprietor, or co-sharing body, to another within the caste. So, sales figures alone do not provide an accurate picture, nor do the exaggerated accounts of British officials who saw only what came before them in the courts.[39] Even in the rare occurrence of Sikh Jats losing their lands their dominant position in the local economic and political arena was not challenged.

In the years 1851-53 the Administration Report recorded that there were eight cases of forced land sales or transfers.[40] This had reached three forced land sales and 14 transfers by 1856-57.[41]

Other reasons for land alienations, further muddy the waters of the somewhat simplistic theory of events some of the British, and some subsequent historians, had to offer. The land had to be of value to the auction purchasers. For instance, in the south east of the Punjab agriculture was uncertain because it was dependent upon the vagaries of the elements. Because of this reliance on unpredictable rainfall agricultural credit was limited, and so the land had less value than that in more

---

39 T.R. Metcalf, p135.

40 P.A.R. 1851-52 to 1852-53. p137.

41 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. pp14-15.

secure areas.[42] Therefore there were fewer forced land sales or transfers throughout much of the south west than in other parts of the province.

In tracts that had access to more permanent forms of irrigation, agricultural practices were more advanced, and improvements to the land could be undertaken. Therefore, there was value in the land, and credit was available. Here increases in productivity depended upon the agriculturalists; if industrious they could do well and pay the revenue demand. Conversely, if agriculturists were held back by caste restrictions - for example, the custom of "Superior" Rajputs forbade them to plough the land themselves - or "laziness," or even lack of knowledge (which the British tended to assume was innate in some groups), or skill in farming practices, their land, if alienated for debt, were worth purchasing, for there existed the enhanced value of such land.

In the south-west Punjab and parts of the lower frontier there were more land alienations, usually to the Hindu trading castes.[43] This was the case, however, before annexation, as well as after. In cases where civilian rebellion broke out in the Punjab, notably in Murri and Gugera, there had not been a greater rate of alienation of lands after annexation than there had been under Sikh rule. The inhabitants of these regions, predominantly

---

42 Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition, p37.

43 Ibid.

Muslims, were pastoralists more than agriculturists, because of the difficulty of farming the soil, and because of their inherited traits which, in Gugera at least, were more conducive to plundering other villages and rustling cattle than laboriously eking a living from the land. The Kharrals of Gugera were descended from Rajputs, and so looked with contempt upon those who ploughed the land.[44]

In parts of the upper frontier, where conditions were similar to those in the south west, where there were instances of individual landed property, land transfers were common before and after annexation. However, the money lenders usually were not the alienees.[45]

Also, there existed variations within a particular district, regarding the transfer of landed property rights. For example, in Jhelum, in the north only a small percentage of the cultivated land was transferred, mainly to agricultural castes, not to the urban money lenders. Yet in large parts of Gujranwala, and in Ambala, of the larger number of alienated land, Hindu trading castes were the purchasers.[46] In the ten central districts of the Punjab, which were most heavily populated by Sikhs, the small number of alienated land tended to remain in the control of the wider caste group. In this way, landed

---

44 Denzil Ibbetson, Punjab Castes, Delhi, 1916. Reprint New Delhi, 1974. pp174-75.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

holdings did not usually pass out of the hands of industrious proprietors into the ownership of urban absentee landlords.

In the central districts of the Punjab, agriculture was secure due to the skill and enterprise of the proprietor/cultivators, predominantly Sikh Jats, aided by high rainfall and the added incentive of the proposed re-opening of the Bari Doab and Hasli canals, on which work was progressing. Legal transfer of property rights acted first and foremost in favour of many landed Sikhs, although as a corollary, it began to diminish the power and influence of the hereditary landowners, the aristocratic classes of the Punjab.

The Undermining of the Aristocracy

To compensate for loss of revenue, because of the "light" land tax levy in the Punjab, the British administrators drastically reduced the amount of state funds that had been flowing into the coffers of the upper classes.[47] This was carried out gradually, but steadily, substantially reducing the social status and power of the aristocracy.

Chiefs and jagirdars[48] had begun losing much of their power and influence as a result of the century-long peasant movement led

---

47 Domin, p86.

48 Jagirdar: Collects revenues from the lands allotted to him. Under the Sikh governments he was virtually a sovereign with the powers of life and death, whereas these powers were curtailed under British rule. The jagirdar held no estate or property itself.

by militant Sikhs,[49] while the emergent aristocracy had been brought under the control of Ranjit Singh. Under his auspices the limited nature of jagirs[50] and their dependence on actual service were strictly adhered to. But, after Ranjit Singh's death, the lifestyle of the jagirdars became more precarious. Against this background, the British were able to reduce further the landed possessions of the upper classes without causing any major disturbances. However, grievances may have been harboured by those whose jagirs were substantially reduced or removed altogether. But, they maintained their livelihood and even, in some cases, their lands.

A large portion of state revenue had been lost to the state's coffers during Sikh rule because of the excessive granting of jagirs. Altogether, nearly 40 per cent of the total revenues of the Punjab were alienated as jagirs.[51] Vassal chiefs had formed an important section of the ruling class in Ranjit Singh's kingdom. They were among the foremost jagirdars of Ranjit and his successors, and their shares in the revenue of the Sikh empire were as considerable as their role in its administration.[52]

---

49 These Sikhs predominantly were Sikh Jats. This movement promoted the egalitarian message of Sikhism.

50 Jagir: mode of payment, granted for life or often in perpetuity to chiefs who served the state. J.S. Grewal, New Cambridge History of India, the Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press, 1990. p107.

51 Grewal, p109.

52 Indu Banga, Agrarian System of the Sikhs, Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century. New Delhi. 1978. p62.

The aim of the British administrators was to diminish the position of the jagirdar by replacing gradually the jagir with a cash payment, or pension, by depriving jagirdars of their former police power, and, ultimately, by phasing out jagirdars altogether by refraining from granting new jagirs.[53]

In the Manjha, dominated by Sikhs, concessions were made to strengthen the numbers of large landholders from other communities.[54] This was mainly in order to check the dominant position held by Sikh proprietors, who were usually the cultivator as well.

British land policy presented grater threats to the status and occupation of many landholding classes than did Sikh rule. Yet every change that occurred was influenced significantly by the desire of the landholders to maintain their traditional standing. In the central Punjab, Rajputs had lost much land to industrious cultivators, who had often been favoured by Sikh officials,[55] a situation continued by British officials. Sikh Jats frequently benefited from the Rajputs' lack of toil and industry on the land. The important position of the Rajputs in this central region had been seriously eroded during Sikh rule, a situation continued under British rule.

---

53 Domin, p82.

54 Ibid., p80.

5 Van den Dungen, "Status and Occupation." p75.

Partly arising from the egalitarian peasant movement, led by Sikh Jats, was a peculiarity of Punjabi society, the predominance of peasant proprietors who cultivated the land themselves.[56]

While British land policy favoured the cultivating peasants, in particular Sikh Jats, at the expense of the aristocratic classes, the latter were not entirely divested of their holdings. They, in the main, retained their livelihood, their positions, and, in many cases, some landed possessions.

So, tendencies often seen as a result of the advent of the British were, in fact, already in existence under Ranjit Singh. Furthermore, some Sikh aristocrats, in 1857, welcomed the opportunity to redress past animosities towards the British.[57]

56
B.H. Baden-Powell, Land Systems of British India, London, 1892. 3 Vols. Reprint New York, London, 1972. Vol II, p569.

57
More on this in Chapter 5.

5. MILITARY SITUATION BY 1857

In 1856, out of the entire British garrison in India of 45,000 men, 16,000 were quartered in the Punjab.[1] The strength of the Indian Army, that is the Bengal Army, had been reduced regularly until, in 1856, there was a total of 230,000, the great bulk of whom were concentrated in the Punjab.[2] Five weak European corps were all that remained to hold the region from the Sutlej River westwards to the frontier, as they were greatly outnumbered by Hindustanis?[3]

The Punjabis serving abroad in the regular army, during the year before the outbreak of mutiny, were sending their pay home to the Punjab, thereby enriching that province. Many of these soldiers also sent home to their villages their spoils of plunder.[4] The Sikh Jat agriculturists, especially those of the Manjha, benefitted greatly from this influx of wealth. In the years before, thousands of rupees had been drained out of the Punjab, especially to Oudh, because the Hindustani sepoys serving in the Punjab had been sending their pay home.

Because of the military qualities and skill of the Sikhs, the British searched for means to stabilise British rule in the

---

1 Thorburn, p192.

2 Ibid, p193.

3 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p308.

4 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p16.

Punjab. There were three areas of military service available to Sikhs and other Punjabis. They were the armies of the East India Company, which included the Military Police; the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force, known by the acronym "Piffers," which had been formed as a local body after annexation; and the civilian Police Force, which was utilised to strengthen the executive power and suppress internal disturbances.[5]

The Bengal Army recruited the most restless and militant people of the Punjab. They were enlisted in disciplined, British-controlled units, so they would not be in a position to create disturbances in the province. The British policy of altering the composition of the Bengal Army by enlisting Punjabis and Sikhs was intended to provide an admixture of races and creeds so one race, caste or religion did not dominate. Previously, the regular army had been dominated by high-caste Hindus, mainly Brahmins, drawn from Oudh and Bihar. The Governor-General, Dalhousie's attitude to this policy was that conditions in the army, as well as in the Punjab, would improve upon enlistment of Sikhs. Initial restrictions, however, imposed by the government, severely limited the number of Sikhs admissible to the regular army.

By 1851, however, a new line of policy commenced whereby a quota of 200 Punjabis, including 100 Sikhs, per regiment was

---

5 Domin, p105.

allowed.[6] While some officers commanding Bengal regiments stationed in the Punjab enlisted former Khalsa soldiers, others did not. Nevertheless, not enough young Sikhs could be found, who had never fought against the British, to enter the British forces. Therefore, there were less than 3,000 Sikh regulars in the Bengal Army by 1857.[7] However, exact figures were not accessible until April 1858.

The first regular Sikh regiments formed were two organised in the Cis-Sutlej States, after the annexation of the Trans-Sutlej States, after the first Sikh War in 1846. They had been intended to include the most militant of the populace, and consisted predominantly of Malwa Sikhs. They were intended for use outside the Punjab.[8] During the mutiny they were incorporated into the Bengal Army and stationed in the North-Western Provinces, where the Ludhiana Regiment mutinied in June 1857. The Ferozepur Regiment remained loyal to the British. These regiments had not participated in the second Anglo-Sikh War.

Four more regiments were formed, with recruits from the annexed Sutlej States, for general service, and stationed within the British territory in the Punjab to subdue the local population and guard the border of the Sutlej. They were called Local Sikh Infantry Regiments, yet comprised a mixture of Rajputs,

---

6 Ibid, p131.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid, p106.

Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims. Experience with these forces was important for the later British recruitment programme.[9]

The First Local Sikh Infantry Regiment, recruited by Major Hodson who later established the Punjab Irregular Force, was to consist of only Sikhs, but for the sake of diversity, and to prevent the domination of the armed forces by one group, other recruits were also admitted, with Sikhs maintaining a dominant position, nevertheless. In 1853 Sikhs still comprised more than half of the strength of this First Sikh Regiment, so some of them were transferred to the Punjab Irregular Force, as directed by John Lawrence.[10]

The Second Sikh Infantry Regiment was recruited mainly from hill-men of the Jullundur Doab, and was mostly stationed there.[11] The third Local Sikh Regiment had a large contingent of Hindustani sepoys in its lines. And the 4th Sikh Regiment was conspicuous in volunteering to fight the insurgents at Multan in 1849. The first and fourth Sikhs fought the Khalsa troops at Multan, and so earned great respect from the British. Because these Malwa Sikhs fought well and were trustworthy soldiers, Dalhousie gave the orders for Sikhs to be enlisted from the Punjab proper. Low caste Sikhs, including Mazhbi Sikhs, were

---

9 Ibid, p106.

10 Ibid.

11 P.A.R. 1849-50 to 1850-51, p40.

to be excluded from the regular regiments. Dalhousie resented this attitude, for he believed Mazhbis to be valiant soldiers with a very good reputation. However, he capitulated to his Chief Commissioner, John Lawrence, and his District Officers, and Mazhbis remained excluded until 1857, when they proved themselves before Delhi.[12]

Enlistment of Sikhs from the Manjha into the regular Bengal Army regiments had great political value, so in early 1857 Dalhousie issued instructions on how Sikhs were to be treated in the ranks. They were not to be bullied, by high caste Hindus, into abandoning their customs, and were permitted to keep their hair and beards uncut.[13] They were not to be formed into a separate company, but interspersed throughout the regiments. However, the on-going hostile attitude of the high-caste sepoys, mainly Brahmins from Oudh, plus the reserved attitude of the officers, discouraged Sikhs from enlisting in the regular army at this time. Those Sikhs, and other Punjabis, who were admitted into the regulars found themselves ostracised by the Oudh and Bihar sepoys. Thus, by 1857, the number of Sikhs permitted in the regular forces, 100 per regiment, had not been attained.[14]

---

12 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, pp268ff.

13 Domin, p115.

14 However, until 1858 no returns of the composition of the Bengal Army were available. Ibid, p117.

Of the almost 3,000 Sikhs in 74 regiments of the Bengal Army approximately half of these could no longer call themselves Sikhs, for they had been pressured by the Hindustani sepoys to renounce Sikhism for Hinduism. Some Sikh sepoys had been forced to leave the army because of this pressure from fellow sepoys. Furthermore, Sikhs were poorly represented among the officers, which was no inducement to them to enter the regular armed forces. Because Sikhs, and other Punjabis, were spread so thin amongst the regiments, their influence was diluted anyway.[15]

In addition to the Bengal Army, the second course open to Sikhs was the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force, comprising mainly Muslims and Sikhs.[16] From the outset, this force was loyal to the British. The position of the Sikhs serving in the regular Bengal regiments was quite distinct from those in the Punjab forces, which were irregular units with special terms of enlistment and service, and therefore separate aims.[17]

The Punjab Frontier Force had been formed to maintain internal peace in the province, and to guard the western frontier. To support the "Piffers" the Guide Corps was raised for services in the tribal areas of the frontier. They had the advantage

---

15 Ibid, p132.

16 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p312.

17 Domin, p131; Montgomery, p70.

of local knowledge, they were courageous, well-trained and possessed great endurance.[18] At the frontier posts above Peshawar, the Khelat-i-Ghilzais were formed to protect the frontier, and support the British.[19]

As the number of Sikhs in the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force was to be restricted, because a Sikh contingent was regarded as highly dangerous, there was a large admixture of Hindustanis. By 1854, of the entire strength of the irregular force of 17,500, only ten percent were Sikhs and almost one half were Punjabi Muslims.[20] However, the proportion of Sikhs had grown by 1857, so that it was considerable, but not dominant. The strongest position was held by Punjabi Muslims. The Punjab irregulars, numbering about 23,000, could have tipped the balance if they had sided with the Hindustani rebels, but they remained loyal to the British thereby ensuring a British victory by swelling the troop numbers, replacing disarmed sepoy regiments, and by fighting alongside the British on the Ridge before Delhi. The Sikh levies raised by the independent Sikh chiefs also added to the loyal troops endeavouring to keep the province calm. Recruitment parties travelled throughout the province, including the Manjha, from June 1857. However, the term Sikh is misleading as the Punjabi troops consisted of other Punjabis as well; so

---

18 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, p254.

19 Ibid, p471.

20 Domin, p108.

difficulties arise in endeavouring to ascertain the true proportion of Sikhs. It would appear that Sikhs enlisted in somewhat small numbers in the early months of rebellion, but their loyalty was rekindled when the British finally re-took Delhi in late September 1857.[21]

The third area of service in which Sikhs could enrol was the Military Police. The formidable police force had been raised to preserve public order.[22] Of the civilian police, the ordinary police force was better paid in the Punjab than in other provinces. The customary chaukidar was retained, and paid by villages and municipalities, whereas the detective police were paid by the government.[23] Sikhs were admitted to the detective police in quite large numbers. This service was generally preferred to that of the military police. Both played an important part in the mutiny. As a rule they did not support the insurgent sepoys, but sided with the British against them.

---

21 Ibid, p130.

22 Thorburn, p163.

23 Domin, p112.

6. SIKHS RESIST OUTRIGHT MUTINY

This chapter deals with the crux of the problem of the response of Sikhs to the "Indian Mutiny" of 1857. The previous chapters have led us to this point, where we will endeavour to pull all the tangled threads together and ascertain why Sikhs resisted outright mutiny, if indeed they did.

In contemporary British official accounts of events during 1857 a number of reasons were offered for the support, be it active or passive, provided by Sikhs in the Punjab. These accounts are based on the importance of fair and good administration of the province by the British rulers since annexation in 1849. The self-congratulatory stance taken by the British officials and their apologists is little more than virtual propaganda.[1] This attitude is echoed by the writings of nineteenth century biographers such as R. Bosworth Smith, and contemporary historians, such as J. Cave-Browne.

Controversy continues to range amongst historians about the motives which compelled large numbers of Indians to rise against the British throughout northern India in 1857. Similarly, controversy surrounds an understanding of the reasons why the majority of Sikhs in the Punjab did not rebel against the British. According to the British, the crucial point that influenced

---

1 Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 18, 1859. p323.

the Sikhs during the mutiny was the general situation in the Punjab. Broad sections of the rural community had not yet been adversely affected in their living conditions.[2] Because of the great reduction in land tax, peasant lands had not been transferred to any extent, as was the situation in the older provinces. Furthermore, the social structure of the Punjab was still intact, although British policy was increasingly undermining the power and position of the aristocratic and land-owning elements of society before 1857. Those factors that were to cause such upheaval in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh were largely lacking in the Punjab.[3] While on the surface this would appear to back up the British contention: that Sikhs in the Punjab did not rebel against them in 1857 as a direct result of British beneficent government; similarly, that in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, the populations rose against the British because of the extreme hardship they faced as a result of British rural reforms.

But, as Eric Stokes goes to some efort to point out, closer inspection of particular districts in the North-Western Provinces makes it quite clear that there was no direct correlation between those areas of fiercest rebellion with those that were hardest hit by the economic reforms.[4] Motives for rebellion were more

---

2 Many recent historians, also, reiterate this pro-British version of events in the Punjab in 1857, e.g. Domin, p50.

3 Domin, p133.

4 Stokes, p102.

obscure than a straight-forward link between the agrarian upheaval caused by the British ruler's new economic policies and rebellion, as pursued by such historians as S.B. Chaudhuri, who went so far as to view the economic changes in Allahabad as an "agrarian revolution."[5] More recently, Domin goes to great lengths in dealing with the positive aspects of British rule in the Punjab.

She views the situation in the Punjab as best understood in the light of that province's socio-economic background. She notes substantial improvements in the living standards of both peasant proprietors and tenants, which had been made possible at the expense of the former jagirdars and zamindars.[6] While condemning the capitalist motivations of the British, she admires the pro-peasant tone of their reforms regarding land ownership. She concludes that the continuation of privileges for Sikh Jat cultivators, begun under Ranjit Singh's rule, resulted in their support in 1857. Because Domin adheres to a Marxist economistic approach, her conclusions are not complete. I do not believe she is actually incorrect in her belief in the significance of land issues and support of the peasantry as reasons for the absence of organised Sikh rebellion. But I do not believe these are the prime motivations. I think she has not gone far enough. Further detailed study of the central districts of

---

5 S.B. Chaudhuri, Civilian Rebellion in the Mutinies, p 298-99.

6 Domin, p 53

the Punjab emphasises the wait and see attitude of the majority of Sikhs, with its inevitable conclusion that, had Delhi not been retaken by the British, most Sikhs, and other Punjabis, would probably have risen against the much-weakened colonial power.[7] With the help of such historians as Eric Stokes and Thomas Metcalf, we need to attempt a more complete picture of the Sikh response to 1857.

If the factors present in the North-Western Provinces led to incidences of rebellion in that province, it follows that in the Punjab, where such economic hardships were as yet absent in the main, this lack of adverse circumstances could be seen as the reason for lack of organised rebellion on the scale of the older provinces. But this is faulty reasoning because it tends to base its premise on hindsight: because the majority of Sikhs did not revolt, therefore they had no intention of revolting. This is a recessing argument, and therefore not valid. Also, it is not borne out by the facts. At the very least, some doubt is raised regarding motives for rebellion against or support of the British. They continued the privileges meted out to Sikhs Jats, begun during Ranjit Singh's rule. Less efficient landholding castes, such as Rajputs and Sayyids, had not received these privileges from the Sikh government. Sikh Jats had often been so entitled as to pay only the state revenue, with no extra payments because they belonged, in general

---

7 This is actually recognised in the official mutiny reports. P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Temple to G.F. Edmonstone, Secretary to the Government of India, 25 May 1958. p364.

to the favoured group of occupancy tenants. These Sikh Jats lived almost exclusively in the ten central districts of the Punjab, which were regularly settled up to 1856.

The British administrators believed their economic and fiscal policies would in turn be rewarded by the loyalty of Punjabis, particularly the privileged Sikh massses.

John Lawrence emphasised this in his Mutiny Administration Report, in those critical months. He stated,

> So long as we were at all able to exert authority, most agriculturists were quite willing to pay tribute to Caesar, but it would be vain to assume the existence of any active heartfelt loyalty. However, there existed no feeling against us; there was a kind of passive sentiment in our favour among the masses.[8]

Accordingly John Lawrence believed the people of the Punjab bore the British no ill-will, either before the outbreak of mutiny, or during it.

Some British propaganda even went so far as to suggest that all Punjabis supported the British and that the Punjab was completely tranquil throughout the rebellion. It was stated categorically in the Punjab Administration Report of 1856-58 that there was no grievance to complain of regarding the British land revenue system in that province.[9] It went on to state that

---

8 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p39.

9 This was reiterated in the Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p323.

> The tenures were fairly adjusted, and that there was no class, among landholders and cultivators who had suffered by British rule, there were no dispossessed malcontents, no depressed village communities, no upstart usurpers over the heritage of others through the operation of British laws, no wholesale extensive transfers of estates or tracts, from one set to another, although some unfortunate transfers of individual property did occur, but such cases were exception. So, among agriculturists, no benefit was to be gained by a change of government.[10]

In addition to their economic reforms, the British brought political stability to the Punjab which had been in a state of upheaval since Ranjit Singh's demise.[11] The British administrators believed these efforts would be rewarded by the loyalty of the populace. When the Sikhs, on the whole, had not turned against them in 1857, they wholeheartedly believed this was due to their beneficial policies.

However, conditions in the Punjab were not as favourable for the peasantry as the British asserted. The statistics, which show only a few forced sales or transfers by 1857,[12] do not reveal the complete picture. Many Sikhs were forced to leave their land because of economic hardship and seek paid employment

---

10 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p16.

11 Talbot, p34.

12 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. pp14-15.

elsewhere. According to the Administration Report of 1851-53 this was due, primarily, to a slump in agricultural prices and the accompanying drop in real income.[13] High wages were offered in the large military cantonments and in the Department of Public Works because of the great demand for labour. This influenced the Sikh cultivator to abandon his field temporarily, to return at a more fortuitous time.[14] The Sikh peasantry in Amritsar District did not face such circumstances of hardship, but those in Lahore District did, where conditions were tough on the rural population in the early 1850s.[15]

Furthermore, conditions cannot have been perfect, even for those who were faring better on the land, for Sikhs lived with the defeat of two wars waged for their independence. Ex-Khalsa soldiers found it very difficult to settle on the land, even though reasonable terms were granted them in order to do so successfully. However, they were not able to do what they were trained to do, that is soldiering. Former Khalsa soldiers were not permitted in the regular armed forces until the mid 1850s. So it is probable that these Sikhs, also, were not content.

Even had conditions in the Punjab been as favourable as purported, Stokes discovered that this was not a motivating factor when gauging their response to a crisis.

---

13 P.A.R. 1851-52 to 1852-53, pp105ff.

14 Ibid, p106.

15 Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab. Amritsar District. Lahore, 1884. p32.

In the North-Western Provinces the high rate of forced land sales was not necessarily as a direct result of heavy land assessments. Often it was those districts whose assessment was lightest that had the highest transfer or sale rate. For instance, the "lightly" assessed parganas of Saharanpur and Sultanpur had a much higher rate of transfers than the more heavily assessed parganas of Gangoh and Deoband.[16] More of an indication to being a successful agriculturist under the agrarian restructuring was the skill and industry of the cultivator. In the Punjab, Sikh Jat cultivators were the highest skilled and most enterprising of agriculturists. This situation was improved still further by the provincial government's continuation of privileges, regarding land tenure, and state revenue payments. Many individuals, the majority of whom were Sikhs, who had been tenants, were recorded by the British administrators as proprietors in the First Regular Settlement, in order to improve their circumstances.[17]

The availability of adequate irrigation was also an important factor. The construction of irrigation canals was a significant step, because, under the new rural economy, in all the British-controlled provinces where such construction works were undertaken, industrious communities could make good.[18] The greatest

---

16 Stokes, p175.

17 Domin, p50.

18 Stokes, p170.

proportion of Sikhs on the land, Sikh Jats, were enterprising cultivators who quickly took advantage of the benefits of canal irrigation. The backward, thirsty tracts in the North-Western Provinces were home to the main elements of revolt.[19] Similarly, in the Punjab those areas without the benefits of reliable irrigation were the scenes of anti-British sentiment, for instance the dry and barren districts in the south-west, and the southern-most district of the Central Plains, Ferozepur. The districts of Sirsa, Hissar and Rohtak, in Haryana, which were arid and without benefit of year-round irrigation before 1857, were openly hostile to the British.[20] The inhabitants of Haryana had more in common with their eastern neighbours than with Punjabis, and sympathised with the rebel cause, justifying their unrest as being a direct result of British rural reforms.[21] The dominant cultivating castes in Haryana were Jats, Rajputs and Gujurs, all of whom were disaffected.[22] The dominant castes and notables initiated rebellion in their regions, predominantly for personal and local reasons than a real desire to rid themselves of their British overlords.[23] Yet, the rural

---

19 Ibid, p175.

20 K.C. Yadav, The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana, Delhi, 1977. p57.

21 Haryana had been regularly settled before the Punjab proper. Accordingly, the revenue demand was higher than the Punjab, as it was in the North-Western Provinces. Yadav, p59.

22 Ibid, p56.

23 Judith Brown, Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy, Oxford University Press, 1985. p84. Much of the population had actually benefitted under British rule.

populations in the backward, barren lands in the Derajat, for instance, and in many parts of Multan, remained tranquil throughout the crisis of 1857.

Just as the response to the rebellion in 1857 cut across the major caste categories, so was Sikh response varied. Within the major castes was a divergence of response, because such response followed vertical political lines rather than the horizontal divisions of caste affiliations.[24] So the question becomes one not of Muslim versus Hindu, or Hindu versus British, but one of Hindu versus Hindu, and so on. For instance, the Hindu Jats of Rohtak versus other Hindu Jats of Rohtak.[25]

So the response of Sikhs in the Punjab is not an easy one to gauge either, because of the variety of types of Sikhs, as discussed in Chapter 3, Sikhs and Sikhism. Sikhs are referred to in official reports, and by most historians, as a distinct, unified group. However, as McLeod so ably points out, this is not so, and because of this it is difficult to understand just which Sikhs did what. Sikh Jats were the most dominant group in the Manjha. Mazhbi Sikhs, the outcasts, not considered by many Sikhs to be entitled to call themselves Sikhs at all, played a significant role in 1857 in their support of the British, especially in the fight for Delhi. Ex-Khalsa Sikhs formed yet another section of the Panth. There was not always a clear

---

24 Stokes, p39.

25 Ibid, pp15-16.

distinction between these sections of Sikhs, as amongst some sections there was an overlapse. Another group of Sikhs were those who did not fight against the British in the Anglo-Sikh Wars, who remained loyal to them during 1857 also. Outside the central districts the influence of Sikhs was lessened in proportion to their numbers. However, to further complicate matters, some Sikhs did rise up against the British, within the Punjab, the notable example being the uprising at Sialkot,[26] and outside the Punjab.[27]

It would appear, therefore, that exorbitant land revenue demands were not the prime motivation for rebellion in the North-Western Provinces, and,so, the "lenient"land settlements in the Punjab were not the reason for binding the Sikh populace, in general, to the British.

With such a comparatively small number of forced land sales and transfers in the Punjab, merely three forced sales and 14 transfers by 1857,[28] it is evident that alienation of landed property rights was not an overwhelming issue for Punjabis, even less so for cultivating Sikhs who, as a rule, managed to hold onto their lands and pay the revenue demand on time. This

---

26 Sikhs fought on both sides at Sialkot. This important part of the rebellion is discussed later in this chapter, on p127.

27 Those Sikhs in regular army regiments that mutinied in the North-Western Provinces are discussed later in this chapter, on pp140-43.

28 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. pp14-15. This had hardly risen since before annexation.

high-lights the ease with which one may view it as the primary reason for their lack of revolt.

Other reasons for a high transfer rate, as well as a lack of skill and industry, were poorly-organised, less-structured village communities, and co-sharing bodies who were not homogeneous. These village communities may well have remained passive while losing greater amounts of land than other well-organised groups, while better-organised, structured village communities, under less pressure of circumstances, could build a shared grievance into an impetus to revolt.[29] Such patterns of community organisation led to different responses, even within castes and districts. The highly-organised, farming Jat communities of the western parganas of Muzaffarnagar broke into open rebellion against the British. They had lost some land to the money lender in the years before 1857, but their losses were small when compared with those of the Sayyid communities of the eastern parts of the district.[30] The Sayyids suffered a greater loss of land, yet remained passive in 1857.

Those areas where rebellion was rife were not necessarily those in the worst circumstances, nor had they had most lands transferred. British land policy was but one grievance held by agrarian communities in the North-Western Provinces, amongst a

---

29 Metcalf, p158.

30 Stokes, p175.

complex mixture of motives that led some to rebel and others to remain loyal to the British. It did not follow that those who lost most were most inclined to rebel.[31] More important than the material loss of lands, or dire hardship due to overassessment, was the loss of lordship rights, and prestige in the wider political community. Those zamindars who had been dispossessed of their landed property rights still maintained an important position within the village community. But, on the larger political stage their position and status was greatly undermined as a result.[32] They were reduced "to a level with the meanest before the law,"[33] and as such counted as unimportant with the British administration.

Stokes poses a theory of "relative rather than absolute deprivation."[34] So, the perceived loss of their powers of military lordship and jurisdiction, and their traditional status and way of life, was of utmost importance to those zamindars, magnates and taluqdars in the older provinces who rebelled against the British. These traditional leaders were politically rather than economically motivated. The aim of many of the leaders of resistance in these provinces was to regain their

---

31 Ibid, p135.

32 Metcalf, p134.

33 Ibid, p175.

34 Stokes, p135.

political autonomy.

To a great extent, the forces which lay behind Central India's magnate's decision to resist the British were absent in the Punjab. Furthermore, rebellion could only be attempted when there was a groundswell pressure from below, that is from the rural masses. This was not forthcoming in the Punjab, as they had not been pushed by such adverse circumstances that they would take the chance against the power and prestige of the British. For, while the British put in place policies that bettered the lot of the peasantry, they simultaneously weakened the position of the traditional elites, the very people to whom the rural masses looked for leadership.

Rural revolt was essentially elitist in character. In fact, in the countryside the mass of the population appears to have had little to do with resistance. At most they followed their caste superiors and their traditional leaders.[35] The superior castes and communities who took the lead in the rebellion in the North-Western Provinces were a minority of the population and, of these, even fewer were landowners.[36] The power and influence of the traditional elites usually were enough to carry the superior peasant castes with them in revolt against the British, or in support of the British.[37]

---

35 Ibid, p185.

36 Ibid.

37 Metcalf, p157.

Traditional leaders, who had been stripped of their power and influence, led the peasant masses in Haryana against the British: such leaders as Rao Tularam in Gurgaon, who collected a small force of cavalry and civilians to fight against the British,[38] and many feudatory chiefs who had been maintained in power and affluence by the British since 1800, such as the Nawab of Jhujjur, the Raja of Bulubgurh and the Nawab of Faruknagar.[39]

But in the Punjab proper traditional Sikh leaders had been killed, imprisoned or exiled, leaving peasants bereft of any competent leadership for organised resistance. Those leaders who remained were too minor, and therefore ineffectual, to have any real influence over the masses.

The disbandment of the Khalsa army had significant effects on the Sikh community as a whole. As the majority of Khalsa soldiers had fought against the British they were deprived of all claims for pensions and privileges.[40] But the British did not want to encourage the reformation of the formidable Khalsa army. So, they were re-settled on the land, whence tolerable terms and inducements were offered them. Many of the former soldiers were forced to return home and resume agricultural pursuits, because

---

38. Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-Western Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857, Ed. by William Muir. 2 Vols. Edinbugh, 1902. Vol II. p290.

39 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p48.

40 Domin, p98.

they were denied employment as soldiers with the British,[41] and refused retirement pensions for the future.[42] Loyal Khalsa soldiers, that is those who did not take up arms against the British in the second Anglo-Sikh War, were rewarded with positions, and in some cases jagirs.

In order to prevent any future hostilities by former Khalsa soldiers, the British jailed and/or exiled their leaders, and abolished the jagirs of those aristocratic elements who had fought against them. In some cases even the lands and all possessions were confiscated from Sikh sardars, or chiefs. However, by 1853, the Governor-General deemed it time to release those Sikh sardars who had been imprisoned, and by early 1854 they were released and their pensions increased, although still a tiny fraction of their former allowances.[43]

By 1857, all the Sikh sardars who had played a prominent role in the 1848-49 Anglo-Sikh War were dead or exiled. Sardar Chattar Singh had died at the end of 1855; Bhai Maharaj Singh, the staunchest Sikh leader, died in exile in Singapore in mid 1856.[44] The leader of the Multan insurrection, Dewan Mulraj, died in 1851. Only Raja Shere Singh, of all the important leaders, was still

---

41 This was the situation immediately after the second Anglo-Sikh War, but it changed by 1851 when Sikhs were recruited for service in the Punjab Forces, and later even in the Bengal Army, in small numbers first, then in greater numbers. Domin, p227.

42 Domin, p102.

43 Ibid, p73.

44 Ibid, p123.

alive, but he was rendered bereft of all means to challenge the British. Still in exile in Benares during 1857, he died there in April 1858.[45] Maharani Jind Kaur alone was in a position to mount any opposition to the British. She made valiant efforts to do so from her exile in Nepal, but Sikhs failed to rally to her cause.[46] So, there were no organised Sikh civilian uprisings in the Punjab because of the lack of effective leadership, and the absence of the active support of the Sikh masses, the majority of whom were fence-sitting. They possibly could have been aroused by a brilliant Sikh leader, but a Sikh chief of that calibre was not available. Any other chiefs of a minor standing who had fought the British had lost much of their former economic and political power.[47] Those chiefs who had sided with the British in 1848-49 were not pressured by those forces that motivated their counterparts in the Gangetic Plain to oppose the British rulers. Even if so inclined, they were neither powerful enough, nor wielded the influence necessary to threaten the British in the Punjab. Furthermore, an awareness of how the British authorities dealt with rebels discouraged them from rising against the British.

A considerable number of jagirdars and other holders of feudal grants had remained neutral during the second Anglo-Sikh War,

---

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid, p173.

or had even actively supported the British forces. After annexation the jagirdars had gradually been deprived of their former privileged position in society, by a dismantling of their incomes. By 1853 the zamindars had begun to best the jagirdars, even re-taking the land which the Sikhs had cultivated themselves for many years.[48] Thus, the role of the Sikh aristocracy, according to Domin, during 1857 was relatively minor in that, in view of their diminished situation, they were not in a position to have rendered substantial assistance to either propagarist.[49] T.E.J. Singh was the only Sikh leader, apart from the independent Sikh chiefs, who had the influence to raise large bodies of troops in any force in support of the British, or against them.[50]

Many Sikh sardars supported the British in 1857, for their own political survival, especially those who had fought against the British in 1848.[51] To a large degree, they had been stripped of their military power and much of their political influence. Leading "rebels" of the Anglo-Sikh wars had had their entire

---

48 Ibid, p123.

49 Ibid, p173.

50 Ibid, p122.

51 Andrew J. Major, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Return to Empire, Punjab Society and the British 1839-1858. Australian University, 1981. p8.

property confiscated.[52] A very important factor for aristocratic elements, whose privilege had been increasingly undermined by the British authorities since annexation, was their honour, or izzat. This was more important even than regaining their confiscated jagirs and lands. Having had their jagirs and pensions, and even their land and all possessions in some cases, forfeited, or at least drastically reduced, many Sikh aristocrats welcomed the opportunity to retrieve their izzat, which support of the British offered in 1857. A natural sequel of re-establishing their izzat was a redemption of their jagirs and lands.

Among the most loyal supporters of the British in the Punjab in 1857 were the independent Sikh chiefs. They had an independent internal jurisdiction, but were politically dependent on the British-controlled government.[53] Of the twelve princely states in the Punjab, six had Sikh rulers. These were Patiala, Nabha, Jhind, Faridkot, Kapurthala and Kalsia, the largest of these being Patiala.[54]

The independent Sikh states were not subject to the agrarian reforms that occurred in the Punjab. The rajas did not lose land, nor did they relinquish any political power and autonomy. These Sikh leaders who brought many trained troops to the cause

---

52 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, p245.

53 P.A.R. 1854-55 to 1855-56. p57.

54 Jeffrey, p41.

of the British were not pressured by the diminishment of their political roles, and thus did not rebel against the British. They had supported, and in turn were supported by, the British since 1809. Also, they were protected by, and dependent upon, the British. Because of this background of mutual support Domin undervalues the importance of the independent Sikh chiefs. Because of their earlier support of the British, she believes this presupposes their continuing support.[55] However, this can not be assumed, for, if they had been stripped of their powers of military lordship and jurisdiction, I believe they could not have been relied upon by the British, no matter what past loyalties and collaborations may have been. In this, Domin ignores the real role played by the Sikh princes. Their role was double-edged. They wielded considerable influence and power, and had many well-trained troops under their command. Had they opposed the British they would have carried with them a very large number of peasants, because, as Stokes maintains, the peasantry follow their traditional leaders for or against the overlord. In Oudh and in the North-Western Provinces some princes raised armies to ride against the British. Therefore, the active support of the Sikh chiefs was of utmost importance to the British.

---

55 Domin, p118.

The princes were also numerous in the Trans-Sutlej Division, where the majority of them were Sikhs. The Sikh chiefs wholeheartedly supported the British by raising levies of troops and horse, by helping to suppress unrest and pursue mutineers and by fighting alongside the British before Delhi. The Cis-Sutlej chiefs, of Patiala, Nabha and Jhind, guarded the communications at the rear of the force before Delhi.[56] The Raja of Nabha raised troops, horse and foot, the protect the siege train from Phillour to Ambala. These chiefs and their troops also protected the British military stations and patrolled the Grand Trunk Road from Ferozepur and Phillour down to the walls of Delhi throughout the campaign.

Throughout the rebellion, the greater proportion of the inhabitants of the Cis-Sutlej Division displayed sympathy with the mutineers.[57] This was an important division in that the Grand Trunk Road traversed its entire length, about 200 miles which had to be kept open to allow men and supplies to reach Delhi from the Punjab. A very small population of Sikhs lived in this division, but it had as its neighbours the Sikh princedoms ot Patiala, Nabha and Jhind. The British responded swiftly to the unsettled population in this region by disarming the

---

56 Parliamentary Papers,Vol. 18, 1859. p310.

57 P.M.R. Vol. I. Report of Events from G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, to Robert Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab, 5 February 1858. p8.

populace, by punishing perpetrators of dissension, and by utilising the independent Sikh chiefs and their troops to quell any unrest. The four million inhabitants of this region were of mixed races, and were more closely allied to Hindustanis than to Punjabis.

In the Cis-Sutlej Division the British had a great deal of assistance from the chiefs of the protected Sikh states. The effect these, and other influential chiefs, had on the morale of the people was of greater value even than the troops they supplied. The Raja of Jhind and 400 of his troops helped protect Karnal, where Ahmud Ali Khan, the Nawab of Karnal, held a critical position, just 70 miles north of Delhi.[58]

Within days of the outbreak of mutiny the Maharaja of Patiala put himself and a large contingent of soldiers, both horse and foot, at the disposal of the British. He sent 1,100 men and munitions to maintain tranquillity in Thanesar, and 150 to Karnal. Detachments of Patiala Horse were posted along the Grand Trunk Road in an organised system of patrols.[59] The district of Ambala was also guarded by the Maharaja of Patiala. The Raja of Chamba protected the European women and children at the Dalhousie

---

58 Cave-Browne, Vol II, p143.

59 P.M.R. Vol I. Narrative of events in the Thanesar District by Captain W. McNeile, dated 24 January 1858. p28.

Sanitorium, and then captured 30 of the Sialkot mutineers.[60] The Raja of Kapurthala marched at the head of a detachment of his troops to protect Hoshiarpur, when the Sialkot mutineers were abroad. Cis-Sutlej chiefs' troops garrisoned several posts of Karnal, Panipat, Kussowlie and Rhae, thereby enabling the British to maintain efficient communications.[61]

The Sikh chiefs of the Ludhiana district, the Raja of Nabha and the Kotila Nawab, lent their aid to the British.[62] This was of paramount importance to the British authorities in this district because the inhabitants of the city and environs were hostile to the British. The Gujur population around Ludhiana was hostile, but the Sikh population of this district sided with the British.

The aristocratic chiefs went to great lengths to support the British. As well as their active support in the form of troops, they were all willing subscribers to the six per cent public

---

60 Ibid, Report from Major Edward Lake, Commissioner and Superintendent, Trans-Sutlej States, to Robert Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab. 5 January 1858. p161.

61 Ibid, Report from G.C. Barnes to Robert Montgomery, 5 February 1858. pp16-17.

62 Ibid, Report from G. Ricketts, late Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana, to G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, 22 February 1858. pp85-86; Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p331.

loan opened throughout the Punjab to affray the heavy expenses of war. The loan operated very well on public opinion, as rural dwellers were delighted to see the wealthy classes forced to lend funds.[64]

Another factor that greatly helped the British in the Punjab in 1857 was the "fluke" that the frontier did not revolt. Peopled by "unruly" Muslim races, predominantly Pathans and Biloches, the North-West Frontier Province was a source of concern for the British authorities before the outbreak of hostilities in 1857.[65]

For the first time in Anglo-Indian history, the Amir of Kabul, Dost Mohammad, the ruler of Afghanistan, was friendly towards the British. So long as the subsidy continued to be paid to Dost Mohammad, and the Punjab remained true to the allegiance, the Afghans would remain "benevolently neutral."[66] The Akhund of Swat also supported the British government as much as he could during the uprising.[67] He sent back those mutineers who had escaped to Swat, knowing that they would be treated

---

64 Thorburn, p225.

65 Ibbetson, p82.,

66 Thorburn, p197.

67 Ahmed, p95.

harshly by the British authorities. The British realised it was only while it was in their interests that they would not oppose the British.

Immediately after the outbreak of mutiny the British instigated measures to tighten their hold on the Punjab. A state of emergency was enacted which placed all power in the hands of the Chief Commissioner, John Lawrence, who promulgated a Mutiny Act as early as 14 May 1857.[68] Enormous powers were entrusted to military and civil officers. The British military authorities responded to the outbreak of rebellion by putting in place vigorous measures to maintain tranquillity in the province. These included a prompt disarming policy, harsh sentences for mutineers, a widespread recruitment policy aimed at those restless elements of the community, heavy fines for unsupportive towns and villages, and the swift, merciless action taken by the authorities to maintain law and order and display an appearance of strength.[69] The British response to the mutiny, especially the violent examples of the rebels, was more effective in preventing rebellion than their previous good government of the province.

Of primary importance to the British was the disarming policy. This effectively prevented those who contemplated rising against

---

68
Domin, p129.

69
P.M.R. Vol I. Report from G.C. Barnes to Robert Montgomery, 5 February 1858. p15.

the British from doing so with any hope of success. The general disarming policy that was put in place after the defeat of the Khalsa in 1848[70] was effective, as, combined with the lack of potential rebel leaders of note, any hopes of the Khalsa re-emerging had little chance of being successful without the benefit of arms. This general civilian disarming was extended to include the populations of the Cis-Sutlej and the Trans-Sutlej Divisions, and civilians in the town bazaars, after the outbreak of mutiny in May 1857. On 1 July the process of disarming the population of Thanesar District was begun. This district was very close to the focus of revolt, on the opposite banks of the Jumna River. The population displayed an open hostility to the British, as did a good portion of the inhabitants of Ambala and Karnal, all of whom were more affected by the proximity and intensity of rebellion than were the populations further to the west. The early disarming of sepoy regiments prevented any co-ordinated actions among those disaffected regiments. On 21 May four out of the five Bengal Army regiments still in the Peshawar cantonment were disarmed, against the protestations of their European officers, who believed they were trustworthy.[71]

The many successful disarmings at the military stations

---

70 Every division was disarmed, except the Trans-Sutlej and Cis-Sutlej States.

71 Thorburn, p203.

throughout the Punjab spelt out the death knoll for concerted actions on the part of those sepoys who planned to mutiny, for without arms they were no match for well-armed British-controlled forces. Furthermore, this meant there was no armed back-up for those civilians who rebelled. Amongst the earliest measures taken was the disarming of the native brigade at Mian Mir in the Lahore District on 13 May by Brigadier Corbett, without which the preservation of order in the Punjab would have been a difficult struggle.[72] The disarming of two of the Native Infantry regiments at Multan was carried out as soon as the officers felt they could overawe them. On 9 June, before the news of the Jullundur mutiny arrived, the regiments were successfully disarmed. The disarming at Multan was believed by the British authorities to be a turning point in the crisis in the Punjab, second only in importance to the disarming at Lahore and Peshawar.[73] Towards the end of June the Judicial Commissioner of the Punjab, Robert Montgomery, instructed his District Officers to have the complete disarming of Hindustanis carried out.[74] The 33rd and 35th Native Infantry regiments were quietly and quickly disarmed at Jullundur Doab, as well as a wing of the 9th Light Cavalry, by Brigadier General Nicholson. After this, on 9 July, he then disarmed the 59th N.I. at

---

72 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18. 1859. p309.

73 Ibid. p317.

74 P.M.R. Vol. I. Report from A.A. Roberts, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore Division, to R. Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab, Lahore, 20 March 1858. p238.

Amritsar.[75] The general disarming of the civilian population was so important to the British for it not only deprived restless populations of the means to rebel, it also had a marked effect on those who had not yet decided which side to support.

As well as the widespread, successful disarming policy, the pursuit of mutineers and deserters also had its desired result. Proclamations of rewards for the apprehension of these rebels were posted in the Divisions, and the majority of the population was eager to comply. Escape for a mutineer, or a deserter, was very difficult, for most villages were anti-pathetic towards him. The Sikh population of Ludhiana posed a threat to mutinous sepoys attempting to reach Delhi to join the insurgents there,[76] and the majority of the Sikhs in the Manjha sided with the British, for they harboured no love or respect for Hindustani sepoys. Moreover, Hindustani officials were unpopular with Punjabis, including Sikhs. Nearly every office of value to the British administration was held by the Hindustanis. After the outbreak of mutiny the Provincial Government displayed a universal antipathy towards them. Hindustanis were weeded out of all departments, therefore, and deported to their homes in

---

75 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from F.H. Cooper, Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, to A.A. Roberts, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore Division, 19 February 1858. p273.

76 Ibid, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts, late Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana, to G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, 22 February 1858. p115.

the east.[77] In their official reports after the mutiny the British over-emphasised this and other aspects of their so-called divide and rule policy.[78]

Another significant aspect of the British response to the outbreak of rebellion was their province-wide recruitment policy, intended to encourage Punjabis on the whole, and Sikhs in particular, to the British cause. Recruitment throughout the Punjab gave a tangible means of rewarding the loyal and persuading them to suppress those Punjabis with anti-British sentiment. The recruitment programme was an important strategy on the part of the British which helped to swing the Punjab as a whole away from rebellion. Inter-clan rivalries were channelled, and the growing uncertainties, and fears of a large section of the population were steered into competition and adventure, more productive and acceptable from the British perspective.

Uncontrolled recruiting began during the state of emergency while the struggle for Delhi was in progress, and it continued after the fall of Delhi.[79] Although several historians emphasise the readiness of Sikhs to enlist in the Punjab forces from the

---

77 Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab, Ludhiana District, Lahore. 1888-89. p32.

78 P.M.R. Vol II. Report from R. Montgomery, Judicial Commissioner for the Punjab, to R. Temple, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner for the Punjab, Lahore, 24 March 1858, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. pp359-60.

79 Domin, p209.

outset,[80] official statements do not support this. In the Administration Report of 1856-58 it is stated that Sikhs from the Manjha showed an unwillingness to enlist in the company's armies.[81] Good recruits of this class, it continues, were not obtained until after the fall of Delhi. Sikhs, especially those who inhabited the Manjha, could await the outcome of the battle for Delhi, because they were not pressured by adverse living conditions, as were the inhabitants of the North-Western Provinces, nor were they unaware of the fighting strength at the command of the British. They could afford to refrain from joining either side until the fall of Delhi.[82] So, the Sikh masses, the veteran Khalsa soldiers and the younger Sikhs were in a position where they could bide their time until the decisive battle of Delhi desired to crush the rebellion at any cost. Sikhs, particularly those of the Manjha, were hesitant to side prematurely with either protaganist. The power and prestige of the British were diminishing in the long, hot summer on the Ridge before Delhi. Only those already in British service had

---

80 T.R.E Holmes, A History of the Indian Mutiny, and of the disturbances which accompanied it among the civil population, London, 1883. p355; Surendranath Sen, Eighteen Fifty-seven, New Delhi, 1957. 2nd Reprint, Calcutta, 1963. p334; Brian Montgomery, Monty's Grandfather, A Life's Service for the Raj; Poole, 1984. pp65-66.

81 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p58.

82 Domin, p130.

to decide who to back from the beginning.

However, to further confuse the situation, and keep the debate alive, Robert Montgomery, in his summation of the district reports states that the "stalwart Sikhs who form the population of the Manjha were wholly on the British side throughout. Many villages were almost decimated by the number of recruits who flocked to form new regiments."[83] In the valleys and hills of Jhelum Division, where a large number of martial Muslim races dwelt, many were recruited to the British cause. By this measure the hill peoples were able to carry out their favourite military pastimes without posing a danger to the British.[84]

Immediately news of the outbreak of mutiny at Meerut had reached Lahore, on 13 May 1857, the Sikh Durbar at Lahore was assured of the government's support. Recruitment of Sikh levies was undertaken at once. Proclamations were posted calling for men to enlist as sowars and foot soldiers. Sikh Sirdars and many jagirdars of the district sent recruits.[85] Irregular Sikh regiments were raised, and more Sikhs were enlisted into the police force and government service. Because the regular

---

83 P.M.R. Vol II. Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of measures adopted during the crisis of 1857, 24 March 1858. p231.

84 Ibid, p244.

85 Ibid, Vol I. Report from A.A. Roberts, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore Division, 19 February 1858, p272.

regiments of the Bengal Army could not be relied upon to remain loyal, the raising of fresh regiments was a priority. These were irregular units in the main.[86] Throughout June 1857 recruiting parties arrived in the Taran Taran pargana of Amritsar District, "being the nursery of the Sikh Khalsa soldiery."[87]

John Lawrence initially was hesitant in enlisting Sikhs into the military forces, but was soon swayed, by the Judicial Commissioner, Robert Montgomery, in particular, into realising the benefits of doing so over and above the disadvantages.[88] Major William Hodson, of the renowned Hodson's Horse, a regiment of Irregular Cavalry, wanted Sikh recruits, especially, for his regiment. Raised at Lahore, Sikhs formed the nucleus of Hodson's Horse.[89]

The recruitment drives in the Punjab were essential to that province's relative tranquillity. Therefore the most capable and martial of Punjabis, especially Sikhs. and Pathan tribesmen,

---

86 Irregular regiments differed from their regular counterparts in their terms for enlistment, their more informal military routine, and in the numbers of European officers who commanded them. Each unit generally had only three British officers compared with 23 in regular Bengal infantry battalions. Montgomery, p70. They were local units with special terms of service and therefore separate interests. Domin, p131.

87 P.M.R. Vol I. Report from F.H. Cooper, Deputy Commissioner, and Superintendent , Lahore Division, 19 February 1858, p272.

88 Montgomery, p66.

89 Ibid, pp67-68.

were enlisted into service of the British, particularly into "Piffer" units.[90] By marshalling their military prowess on behalf of the colonial rulers, the establishment of these new units, and levies, deflected them from rising against the British.

By the time of the outbreak of mutiny, previously unruly peoples of the frontier were offering assistance to the British, and wanting to enlist in the Punjab forces. For example the "warlike" Mullikden Khel Afridis offered their service, and formed the nucleus of one of the new Punjab regiments.

Recruitment in the Punjab was assisted greatly by the independent Sikh princes,who raised large numbers of Sikh levies, and was so successful that 18 new infantry regiments and 7,000 irregular cavalry were raised equalling 34,000 men and more than doubling the size of the old Punjab forces to 58,000 men, mainly Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims. The "Piffers," the Punjab Irregular Frontier Force, formed a major part of this newly raised army, which included the famous Guide Corps. This Corps had been raised, after an idea of Henry Lawrence's, as early as 1846, for service in the frontier. More detail regarding the military situation in the Punjab at the outbreak of mutiny is discussed in Chapter 5, Military Situation in 1857, beginning on page 73. In mid-May the British excerpted the Sikh sepoys from the

---

90
Montgomery, p77.

Hindustani regiments of the Bengal Army, and formed them into separate regiments of Punjab Infantry, the 20th, 21st and 22nd set up at Ludhiana, Ferozepur and Jullundur.[91] The aim of this measure was to discourage the Sikhs from being drawn into mutinous action by their fellow Hindustani soldiers.

In these new levies raised in the Punjab, the Sikh population was much greater than previously. In the new Punjab forces the proportion rose from about ten per cent in the old Punjab Irregular Foce to 35 to 40 per cent in the new Punjab forces. In both the old and new forces, the Sikhs' portion can be estimated at about 25 per cent on average.[92] However, accurate information regarding the exact number of Sikhs in the Punjab forces was available only from April 1858.[93] These newly enlisted men were to replace those disarmed and disbanded sepoy regiments and the soldiers sent to Delhi, to guard insecure and border areas, and to endeavour to maintain a peaceful province. The amount of new levies raised indicates that the British relied heavily on Punjabis for maintaining their position of strength in the Punjab.

---

91 Domin, p148.

92 Ibid, p150.

93 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. pp58ff.

Foot levies were also raised to support the ordinary police in guarding jails, ferries and forts against possible uprisings and escape, and to serve as recruiting depots for subsequent transfer to the new Punjabi regiments.[94] Among the earliest measures taken by the British authorities was the security of the forts of Phillour and Govindgarh. From these forts were the means of re-taking Delhi. The arsenal at Govindgarh was of immense importance as it was the most central stronghold in the Punjab.[95] The irregular levies were also employed in guarding the roads, especially the Grand Trunk Road, which was of vital importance to the British for communications from the Punjab and beyond, between the various military stations and Delhi, and to ensure the safe journey of the siege train to Delhi.

With all these measures swiftly put into place, the Punjab administrators concentrated on maintaining the security of the province. Daily district reports were sent directly to the Judicial Commissioner, Robert Montgomery, who was centrally-based, with the Provincial Government, in Lahore. Circulars were compiled in his office on a daily basis, outlining the general state of the province, and the latest orders from the Governor-General or the Chief Commissioner, and these were distributed to every district.[96]

---

94 Domin, p148.

95 Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 18. 1859. p309.

96 Muir, Vol. II, p278.

The use of the telegraph, a European monopoly, greatly aided the British efforts in crushing rebellions and maintaining a tranquil province. Its importance was demonstrated by the speed with which warnings of impending mutinies were despatched, giving the British the advantage of foreknowledge. Also, the censorship of all mail was ordered and the native press was placed under strict censorship.

Compounding these repressive measures, the British maintained their hold over the Punjab by brutally crushing any attempt at revolt. Public executions were carried out against the perpetrators of mutiny, civil unrest, or any other crime under the emergency powers. Such violent examples made of rebels, including deserters, enabled the colonial machine to continue working. Swift and summary punishments meted out by the civil and military authorities, helped to quell incipient rebellion. Sometimes mutiners, or criminals. such as dacoits and highway robbers, were hanged in full view of their barracks, or of their villages, in order to display clearly that the British still had power and were, in fact, a force to be reckoned with.[97] The official statistics of punishments carried out by the British authorities show the extent to which anti-British behaviour was firmly repressed. In the Punjab, in 1857, altogether 2,384 people were executed and 3,244 were imprisoned, flogged or

---

97 Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 18, p332.

fined.[98] Two particularly brutal and appalling examples of punishments carried out by the British were those at Peshawar and Amritsar. Forty officers and men were all who remained of the 55th Native Infantry who had mutinied at Mardan in the Peshawar Division near the end of May. They fled to Swat, with Nicholson and his men in pursuit. There they received no assistance from the Akhund of Swat, who had them deported beyond the Indus, where they were captured by Nicholson and jailed in Peshawar to await their fate.[99] Other mutinous sepoys from the 55th had perishd in the Kaghan Valley after ferocious battles with the hillmen there. These last 40 sepoys were blown from guns in front of the entire force on the parade ground, and thousands of spectators.[100] It provided a lesson they would not quickly forget. In all 523 military executions were carried out in Peshawar for mutiny and desertion: 20 were hanged, 44 blown from guns, and 459 shot by musketry.[101] A further 277 civil executions were carried out in that division.[102]

---

98 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-1858, p7.

99 Ahmed, p95.

100 Cave-Browne, Vol I, p277.

101 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p287.

102 Ibid, Report from H.R. James, Deputy Commissioner, Peshawar, to Lieutenant-Colonel H.B. Edwardes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, 1 March 1858. p132.

The second example took place in the Lahore Division. At Mian Mir, just outside the city of Lahore, the entire regiment of the 26th Native Infantry murdered their European officers on 30 July, and fled into the countryside.[103] They were caught up with on the banks of the Ravi River, near the tehsil of Ajnala.[104] F. Cooper, the Deputy Commissionr of Amritsar Districtd, forced the fugitives onto a mid-stream island where most were slaughtered. Those sepoys who were not killed outright, over 200 in all, were captured and placed in a "black hole" in which 45 of them subsequently died overnight, from suffocation, over-crowding and sheer terror. The following morning the remainder were blown away from guns in groups of ten at a time.[105] The summary execution carried out at Ajnala, without even a trial, was one of the most gruesome massacres carried out by the British, yet it was approved of by John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab.[106] Lawrence, Cooper, Montgomery

---

103 Thorburn, p217.

104 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from F.H. Cooper, Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, to A.A. Roberts, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore Division, 19 February 1858. p274.

105 Thorburn, p217.

106 Domin, p129.

and Cave-Browne, the Chaplain of the Movable Column,[107] all felt that a stern policy was the only safe one at this critical time, in order to deter further insurrection.[108] According to the British authorities "our critical position at this time justified the awful punishment of these mutineers, 237 in number."[109]

Although the panic-stricken Sikh sepoys were drawn into the revolt of the 55th Native Infantry, on 21 May, at Mardan, they had their arms returned to them, in a bid by the British to divide and isolate the Sikh sepoys from the Hindustani sepoys.[110] Yet the 100 Hindustani sepoys who did not desert with their comrades were denied the return of their arms, the excuse being that they wanted to join their mutinous comrades but were persuaded not to by their officers. This political act of

---

107 The Movable Column was an ad hoc collection of quickly raised units, recruited by H.B. Edwards, Commissioner of Peshawar Division, and trained by John Nicholson, who took over its command, from Neville Chamberlain, at Jullundur on 21 June. The Column left Peshawar on 12 June, and marched to Delhi to reinforce the Delhi Field Force. But its progress was slow as it was obliged to suppress mutinies along the way, including Jullundur, Phillour, Sialkot, Jhelum and Ferozepur. It did not reach Delhi until late August. Montgomery, pp72-73.

108 Cave-Browne, Vol II, pp100ff.

109 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857, p287.

110 Domin, p134.

treating Sikh sepoys in a favourable manner was intended to prevent any concerted actions being planned by Sikhs and Hindustanis. Hindustani sepoys were regularly punished for acts of sedition, or mutiny, when, for the same activities, Sikh sepoys were merely warned.[111] Sikh sepoys had already found themselves ostracised by the Hindustani sepoys in the regiments of the Bengal Army that had Sikh recruits. These new recruits from the Punjab were resented by the Hindustanis, because of religious differences, and because of the military authorities' deference to the customs and dress of the Sikh sepoys.

This policy of divide and rule, which utilised the "hereditary and inextinguishable aversion of the Sikhs for the Purbiah" as a potent weapon in the fight for supremacy was an example of British propaganda, which was echoed in the writings of nineteenth century historians who studied the Indian Mutiny.[112] However, the British did endeavour to exploit any rivalries, or differences amongst the races. During the Anglo-Sikh wars, Muslims, especially those from the tribal border areas, were recruited on the side of the British. Hindustanis also fought against the Khalsa Sikhs in those wars. In 1857, these Muslims dominated the old as well as the new Punjab forces. Hindustanis

---

111 Ibid, p135.

112 Cooper, p235.

were the enemy, too.[113] The flagrant favouritism of the Sikh sepoys, over and above the Hindustani sepoys, resulted from political motives of the British. The potential of that great military force, the Khalsa Sikhs, was as yet untapped. It had not yet committed itself to either side, so the British were very keen to manipulate any latent hostilities between them and the rebels. These manipulative strategies of the British had a marked effect on the population of the Punjab. Overall, Punjabis, including Sikhs, showed relatively little sympathy with the cause of the Hindustani rebels; but neither did they rush to the support of the British, that is, not until after the fall of Delhi.

It was of paramount importance to the British to keep Sikhs, of all types, on their side. They realised that if the Sikh Sirdars and their well-trained soldiers joined the mutineers, the military and political consequences for British rule in the Punjab, indeed in all British India, would be calamitous.[114] Not only would the British face a formidable foe once again, but it would have grave repercussions regarding other Punjabis, who would them believe that the Raj was at an end.

Brian Montgomery asserts that the British retained the allegiance of the Sikh panth due, to a large degree, to the actions of

---

113 Domin, p317.

114 Montgomery, p65,

Richard Lawrence, Captain of Police in Amritsar, and Arthur Roberts, Commissioner of Lahore Division, in the Manjha.[115] They were aided in this by the attitude of many Sikhs to the sepoys, mainly high caste Hindus whom they despised, and who comprised the majority of the Bengal Army native regiments.

Sikhs, on the whole, did not remain loyal to the British, or revolt, primarily because of their economic situation. More important was, among other factors discussed, the violent response of the British to the mutiny. Their brutal reprisals against rebels and deserters, and other criminals, was more efficacious in binding them to the British.

Nevertheless, if Delhi remained in the control of the rebels, it was highly probable that Sikhs, with other Punjabis, would have taken advantage of the weakened condition of the British, and rebelled. This was mentioned in official reports,[116] yet they still clung to the stance that Sikhs were loyal to the British because of the lenient land revenue settlements and other privileges given them in the years before 1857. As the siege of Delhi continued on into September, many people from all over the Punjab began to doubt the power of the British. After so many troops had been drawn off for the Delhi Field

---

115 Ibid, p66.

116 P.M.R. Vol. II, Report from Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p364.

Force, the British position in the Punjab, had become very precarious indeed. John Lawrence was concerned about the repercussions if the force on the Ridge before Delhi were defeated, and the British had to retreat back into the Punjab.[117] The loyalty of the Sikhs could then become doubtful as they, with all other Punjabis, would be induced to turn against the British in their weakened condition, with dire results for the British throughout the Punjab and, ultimately, northern India. Had Delhi not fallen when it did, on 20 September 1857, John Lawrence believed insurrections such as those at Murri and Gugera would have occurred universally throughout the Punjab.[118] Some district officers had also become aware of the precarious position the British found themselves in as they became bogged down in the fight for Delhi, with many of their men sick, exhausted and dying. The Deputy Commissioner of Ludhiana, G.H. Ricketts, firmly believed, at the time and when the crisis was over, that, had the rebels in Delhi held out just three weeks longer, risings would have occurred, in his district and others where there was anti-British sentiment.[119] The rebels then would have attacked the very existence of British authority in the Punjab.

---

117 Montgomery, p76.

118 P.M.R. Vol. II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p364.

119 Ibid, Vol. I, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts, late Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana, to G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, 22 February 1858, p116.

Meanwhile, while Sikh Jats, Khalsa Sikhs, and other Sikhs, especially those of the Manjha, were biding their time, awaiting the outcome of Delhi, one group of Sikhs was determinedly loyal to the British throughout; these were the outcast Sikhs, or Untouchables, the Mazhbi Sikhs, of the lowly sweeper caste, considered by many Sikhs, especially Kes dhari Sikhs, as not belonging to the Sikh panth at all. They had served with the Khalsa army, but were excluded from military service with the British after annexation.[120] Estimated by the Punjab Board of Administration to number 5,000, they were thrown into unemployment by this measure. Many of them, therefore, resorted to dacoity and thuggy.[121] Severely punished for these anti-social activities by the British, and placed under surveillance, 1,000 of their number were then formed into an organised body and employed on road and canal construction.[122]

Mazhbis remained excluded from British military forces until 1857, notwithstanding Dalhousie's viewpoint regarding them. He believed that they were brave and trustworthy soldiers who had previously been employed in that capacity.[123] When sappers

---

120 Domin, p283.

121 P.A.R. 1851-52 to 1852-53, pp51ff.

122 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, pp268ff.

123 Domin, p115.

and miners were desperately needed for the assault on Delhi, the Mazhbi Sikhs were recruited in conflict with earlier orders. They were eager to take on this work, as the majority of Mazhbis were still out of work. Other Sikhs ostracised them to a great degree. The British would not have regarded them as Sikhs for Sikhs to them meant Khalsa Sikhs. This 1,200 strong corps of sappers and miners, collected in the main from the works on the Bari Doab Canal, and other construction sites,[124] performed courageously under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions.[125] They played a vital role in re-taking Delhi, doing the most dangerous jobs, including completing and repairing the batteries, all the while dangerously exposed to snipers from the rear and the rebels inside the walls of Delhi. Many were killed in this duty, but details of numbers were not available, as separate records were not kept for Mazhbi Sikhs, and also because those killed were quickly replaced by relatives. This had been an old custom of the Khalsa army, and was also practised by the Sikh pioneers on the Ride before Delhi.[126] A good percentage of these Mazhbis had been unarmed. Without their most important assistance the British would have taken much longer to conquer Delhi, at a much higher cost in lives, or even have failed to re-take Delhi altogether.

---

124 P.A.R. 1851-52 to 1852-53, p56; P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p334.

125 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, p260.

126 Domin, p161.

John Lawrence ordered a second Mazhbi regiment to be formed on 15 September 1857, at the height of the street-fighting during the assault on Delhi. Thereafter they were employed in the attack on Lucknow, where they carried out the most dangerous tasks unarmed, and the two Mazhbi regiments took part against the determined resistance in Oudh, which continued until the spring of 1859.[127]

Sikhs were not unique in the Punjab. The great majority of Sikhs supported the British, as did most Punjabis, including the Muslims of the North-West Frontier.[128] The number of Sikhs, even in the Manjha, was a small minority. Sikhs comprised just 14% of the population of the Punjab by 1850.[129] Therefore, it was not unusual that they were influenced by others around them.

This was the case also with regard to those Sikhs who did oppose the British. The most notorious example of this occurred at Sialkot, where the Sikhs involved collaborated with the Hindustanis. This station contained a brigade of Her Majesty's 52nd Foot, the 35th Native Infantry, the 46th Light Infantry and the 9th Light Cavalry. Sialkot was also the headquarters of the Musketry Depot for instruction in the use of the new

---

127 Domin, p211.

128 Ibid, p139.

129 Talbot, p32.

Enfield rifle. When the Movable Column was formed all these troops were withdrawn, except for the 46th and a wing of the 9th Cavalry, all of whom mutinied on 9 July 1857. The whole of the civil power was suspended by the simultaneous mutiny of all the Indian troops still stationed at Sialkot.[130] Because Nicholson's Movable Column had just left Sialkot, it proved impossible to disarm the disaffected sepoys. Besides a party of military police, the British had only 200 raw Sikh recruits. The detachment of military police, all Hindustanis, was headed by Sikhs, both the Risaldar of the Mounted Police and the Subedar of the Infantry police. But the military police turned against the British. With the assistance of the principal Sikhs, the jail was opened, and the rising got under way properly. The mutinous sepoys, when fleeing, called on surrounding villages to take over the cantonments, which they did, apparently believing British rule was finished. In order to prove them wrong, and to restore order at Sialkot, those mutineers caught, including the Sikh co-conspirators, were executed. Most were shot immediately, with only a few selected for trial.[131] The

---

130 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p240.

131 Ibid, Vol, Report from Lieutenant C.A. McMahon, Assistant Commissioner, Sialkot, to A.A. Roberts, Commissioner and Superintendent, Lahore Division, 4 February 1858. p281.

Sikh leaders, and the overseer of the jail was publicly hanged. The risk of punishing the Sikhs was considered worth the advantage of the deterrent example.[132] The British believed such extreme retribution was necessary to counter the effects of the much deteriorated position they found themselves in at this stage. The hope of a quick reconquest of Delhi had disappeared.[133] The British policy of preventing united actions was enforced with utmost severity. Further instances of united actions between Hindustanis and Sikhs, or, for that matter, Punjabis in general, could not be found in official records. If they occurred at all, they were the exception to the rule. Generally, Punjabis, including Sikhs, sided with the British within the Punjab.[134]

The interesting aspect of the mutiny at Sialkot is that Sikhs were on both sides. Sikhs aided and abetted, and even led the mutineers at Sialkot, but the levy raised to capture the

---

132 Domin, p138.

133 The general situation before Delhi at the beginning of July 1857 was thus: the British hoped to be reinforced by General Wheeler, who had surrendered at Cawnpore in June, then by General Havelock, whose force was so inferior that it could even proceed as far as Lucknow. Reinforcement was also expected from the south, but those troops from the Madras Residency could get no further than Allahabad. Keith Young, Delhi 1857, Edited by H.W. Norman and Mrs Keith Young, London and Edinburgh, 1902, p60.

134 Domin, p140.

mutineers also consisted of Sikhs. Sikhs were instrumental in preventing the success of most of the incidences of rebellion in the Punjab, especially helping to catch the fugitive mutineers and deserters.

In May 1857, when mutiny erupted throughout northern India, nearly one quarter of the Punjab Force was on furlough. These men were recalled immediately, by means of pamphlets and circulars sent to their villages. They supposedly rejoined their units "in excellent spirits."[135] They were, according to official accounts, eager to ascertain the whereabouts of their regiments.[136] But the fact is omitted in the official report that a considerable number of them preferred to stay away.[137]

Because there were so few European troops stationed in the Punjab, the maintenance of British rule depended to a great extent on Punjabi troops. In some regions there were no European at all, including Gurdaspur, Jhelum, Multan and Sialkot, or only

---

135 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p311.

136 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p336.

137 Domin, p142. It was reported in the Calcutta Gazette, March 1858, Vol XII, p541, and Vol XV, p619, on the orders of the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, dated Lahore, 8 January and 20 January 1858, that soldiers who failed to report for duty were dismissed from service.

an insignificant number.[138] Punjabi Irregulars were brought in to Rawalpindi, as well as some 250 European soldiers, to disarm the remaining sepoys of the 14th Native Infantry, who decided to fight it out. About 100 Sikh and other Punjabi sepoys had been separated from the 14th the night before the uprising, and joined the British and Punjabi Irregulars against their fellow sepoys.[139]

Punjabi troops, which included Sikhs, played an active role in these important operations against the Hindustani sepoys. Sometimes they even decided the outcome, as in the case of Multan, Jhelum and Sialkot.

Besides the mutinous actions of a number of army regiments, or parts of regiments, throughout the Punjab, all of which were successfully contained by the British, there were some incidences of civilian rebellion in that province. The outbreaks at Murri, in the far north of the Jhelum Division, and of Gugera, in the north-west of the Multan Division, were the two major incidences of civilian rebellion in the Punjab. Neither of these insurrections involved Sikhs. In Murri two Muslim hill tribes rose at the beginning of September, but were quickly quashed

---

138 Bosworth Smith, Vol I, p470.

139 Domin, p142.

by the British.[140] Near the end of September several of the southern Bar tribes rose at Gugera. Although the British sent reinforcements to quell the insurrection, the rebels retreated into dense bushland, as was their practice in earlier insurrections against the Sikh government.[141] A party of Sikh and European horsemen caught and killed the leader, Ahmad Khan Kharral, and many of his followers. But this did not halt the insurrection. By the end of September the whole of the district was in open revolt.[142] The Bar tribes were finally caught up with and dispersed by the end of October, after they had plundered Kot Kamalia, in Jhang District, whence the towns-people joined the revolt. There they found and destroyed the account books of the banias in order to remove all record of their debts.[143] The assistance the insurgents had expected from neighbouring influential Muslims, and from Delhi was not forthcoming because Delhi fell to the British just three days after the beginning of the Gugera insurrection.[144]

---

140 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from Lieutenant Geo. Battye, Assistant Commissioner, Murri, to Captain J.E. Cracroft, Officiating Deputy Commissioner, Rawalpindi, 9 January 1858. pp380-81.

141 Ibbetson, p775.

142 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from Lieutenant Elphinstone, Assistant Commissioner [late in charge of Gugera District] to Major G.W. Hamilton, Commissioner and Superintendent, Multan Division, 30 January 1858.

143 P.M.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p

144 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from Elphinstone to Hamilton, pp51ff.

hereditary factionalism and traditional rivalries were the motives for the insurrection. The Upera got of Kharrals rose, so the Lakhera got and several other pastoral tribes retaliated by collaborating with the British.[145] Economic conditions also help to explain the inconsistency of response. The rural reforms of the British meant that by the mid 1850s the southern Bari Doab was moving from pastoralism to agriculture. And the first summary settlements in the Gugera District, as well as the regular settlement, had proved a failure.[146] The immediate socio-economic results of these policies were not uniform, as reflected in the pattern of political response in 1851. But, the forced changes to the pastoralists' traditional way of life was the strongest impetus to revolt.

Both the Murri and Gugera insurrections were limited-scale operations,[147] in comparatively isolated areas: in the

---

145 Major, pp11-12.

146 Report on the Revised Land Revenue Settlement of the Montgomery District in the Multan Division, Lahore 1878, pp142ff, in Domin, p154. The Gugera District was later named the Montgomery District.

147 Although the Gugera insurrection was large in numbers and spread across the entire district, it did not extend beyond the district's borders. The British authorities in the Kangarh District of Leiah Division and the south-western part of Lahore Division quickly took measures to prevent the rebellion from affecting their districts. P.M.R. Vol II.

mountainous tracts of the North-West, and in the sparsely populated jungles of the south. These civilian uprisings were elitist and conservative, and they were opportunistic as they saw the power and prestige of the British ebb away the longer they were caught up in the siege of Delhi. However, neither of these insurrections involved Sikhs, except for those on the side of the British who helped to capture the Gugera rebels.

Besides the uprisings at Murri and Gugera in late September 1857, the whole of Haryana was openly hostile to the British from the outset.[148] Also disloyal to the British were the populations of some of the larger cities and towns. While they did not actually rise up in open insurrection, they did not actively support the British either. These urban dwellers of the cities and large towns were mixed, and included many from outside the Punjab.[149] The two examples looked at here, Ludhiana and Amritsar, were very important; Ludhiana, because it occupied a strategic position on the banks of the Sutlej commanding the high road from Delhi to the Punjab; and Amritsar, because it is a holy place for Sikhs, the home of their most sacred place,

---

148 The situation in Haryana is discussed in Chapter 7, The Importance of Delhi.

149 The city of Delhi is discussed in Chapter 7, The Importance of Delhi. Although Delhi was not part of the Punjab proper at this time, it was of utmost importance to the British both strategically and psychologically. This great, historical city had particular influence on the eventual outcome of the uprising in the Punjab, and ultimately throughout northern India.

the Golden Temple, and the city itself is located in the Manjha. The only available means of communication from the North-West Punjab to Delhi was through Ludhiana. The transport of the heavy siege stores to the British camp on the Ridge before Delhi, from Ferozepur and Phillour, went through Ludhiana which was the only route during the rainy season.[150]

The wealthy bankers and businessmen of the great commercial cities displayed a level of close-fistedness and distrust that indicated how little faith they had in the British capability to overcome the rebels.[151] Such reluctance on the part of the mercantile classes to raise and lend funds to the British cause, on contrast with the financial and material assistance, in the form of troops, of the independent Sikh princes, and as opposed to the cooperation of the majority of the rural populace, was viewed very unsympathetically by the British. The social structure of these mercantile classes had remained intact. Furthermore, the bankers and money-lenders had been prospering due to changes brought about by alterations in land policy by the British, which favoured the Sikh peasantry at the expense of the landed gentry. So, many traditional land-holders had to borrow to keep some of their lands, as jagirs were replaced by life-time pensions. Also, because the land revenue settlement

---

150 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts, late Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana, to G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, 22 February 1858. p114.

151 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859, p329; Cave-Browne, Vol II, pp283ff.

demanded by the British was required to be met in cash, not kind, albeit comparatively lenient, peasant proprietors were beginning to have to borrow money in order to pay it. This had not got under way fully by 1857, and so there had been no great social turmoil in rural areas of the Punjab by that time.

Ludhiana's weak point, from the British authorities' perspective, was its unruly city population, a good proportion of whom were foreign. They were a curious mixture of Kabul pensioners; Kashmiri shawl workers; Hindu Chaudhris, merchants and bankers; Gujurs and Syuds, the old landed proprietors of Ludhiana; and the mixed Muslim population of butchers, petty traders, discharged servants and camp followers.[152] The Kabul colony was the source of trouble in Ludhiana. They plundered the city and were joined by the Kashmiris, who looted the government stores and burnt church and government buildings, and by the low caste Muslims, who frequented the bazaars in the British cantonments, who joined in the general disorder and pillage. These Muslims had been worked into a frenzy by the preaching of an influential Gujur moulvie. His influence spread throughout the district, all along the lowlands bordering the Sutlej River.[153] The Hindu Chaudhris did not join in the destruction, but neither

---

152 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts, late Deputy Commissioner, Ludhiana, to G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent, Cis-Sutlej States, 22 February 1858. pp91-95.

153 Ibid, p94.

did they aid the British. Their influence was substantial and, had they wanted, they could have influenced the Hindu policy of the city population to side with the British.[154] They were inclined to back the winner in a confrontation, so long as this did not interfere with their own personal interests.

The city was affected by the mutiny of the Indian troops stationed at Ludhiana at the outset: a small detachment of 3rd Native Infantry. These sepoys joined the Jullundur mutineers, as all the regiments in the Jullundur Doab had planned to mutiny simultaneously. The 4th Sikhs, who had marched into Ludhiana on the morning of 8 June, assisted the British, as did the troops of the Raja of Nabha. Those of the Maler Kotla, chiefs were also sent to help protect the station at Ludhiana.[155] However, these troops were of little real assistance.[156] From Phillour the mutineers had planned to seize Ludhiana, where they a expected the aid of the city population. While the Gujur population around Ludhiana took the opportunity to support the mutineers, and rustle cattle and so on, the Sikh population of the district sided with the British.

The Booreahs, Harnis and Sansis, who inhabited the districts of Ludhiana, as well as Amritsar, Lahore, Sialkot and Gujrat,

---

154 Ibid, p95.

155 Ibid, pp100-105.

156 Ibid, p115.

made use of the disturbances in Ludhiana to plunder neighbouring villages.[157] But, the urban Hindus, and the agricultural population, in general, did not side with the mutineers. Similarly, the old Khalsa soldiers, who were still numerous in all the large villages in the district, did not support the mutineers, but came forward to enlist for service with the British. In this way, there was the possibility of retrieving their izzat.

The Maharaja Patiala, the most important, influential and effective ally of the British in the Punjab, used his troops to guard the road that connected Ludhiana with Ferozepur. All eight routes from Ludhiana were guarded, with the aim of capturing the mutineers.[158]

The Malwa Sikhs[159] also offered their capable assistance to the British. They were eager and hardy soldiers. The Ferozepur Regiment, almost exclusively Sikhs from the Malwa district,

---

157 Ibbetson, pp277-78, p283.

158 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts to G.C. Barnes, pp110-111.

159 The Malwa district is in the Cis-Sutlej Division, and includes the tehsils of Pukohwal, Jagraon and Budhan. These Malwa Sikhs were Jats, and were thrifty good agriculturists and exporters of their own produce. They were also anxious for military service. They came under a stigma because they were believed to side with the mutineers due to the activities of the mutinous Ludhiana Regiment, whose troops were drawn from the Malwa district. Ibid, p112.

were especially helpful to the British.[160]

The city of Ludhiana was heavily fined, which the entire community had to pay. This measure subdued Ludhiana, and the surrounding market towns in the district.[161] The Gujur population was disarmed, expelled from the city and sent to the lowlands beyond the city environs.[162]

Located in the Lahore Division were the two largest commercial cities of the Punjab, Lahore and Amritsar. Amritsar, the religious capital, was very important as it was seen as a pivot which might turn the loyalty of the Khalsa one way or the other. When mutiny broke out in this Sikh heartland among the Hindustani sepoys, the martial spirit of the people was rekindled.[163] They pursued the mutineers and assisted the British in rounding up deserters. However, like the surrounding agricultural populace, almost exclusively Sikh Jats, except for the Muslims who owned 25 per cent of the land in Amritsar District,[164] these urban Sikhs were also fence-sitting, awaiting the outcome of the fight for ascendancy over Delhi.

---

160 Ibid, p113

161 Ludhiana District Gazetteer, p33.

162 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859, p335.

163 Ibid, p345.

164 Report on the Revised Settlement of the Amritsar District, Lahore, 1883-93, p3.

Although the Sikh population of Ludhiana and Amritsar were with the British, albeit often providing merely passive support, the British authorities recognised that "there must have been a limit to their forbearance."[165]

Many Sikhs from the Ludhiana regiment, from Jhansi, Neemuch and Bareilly corps, who had been tainted by their association with Hindustanis in the North-Western Provinces where they had been stationed, were returning to their homes in the district.[166] There, they spread rumours of the disintegrated state of the British strength in the North-Western Provinces. While the colonial regime remained intact in the Punjab, in the North-Western Provinces, and parts of Central India, pressure from the rebellious masses was so intense that the British were generally believed by those inhabitants, to have been eliminated for good.[167]

The Sikhs in the Bengal regular regiments in the Punjab appeared

---

165 P.M.R. Vol I, Report from G.H.M. Ricketts to G.C. Barnes, pp115-116.

166 Ibid, p116.

167 Domin, p189.

disinclined to join their mutinous comrades.[168] However, those cantoned outside the punjab often took part in the rising of their regiments. So, Sikhs were not unique, as they tended to respond to the unrest as did those around them. This was the case particularly in the North-Western Provinces. The principal mutinies that involved Sikhs outside the Punjab were, in chronological order: Jhansi, 3 June, Benares, 4 June, Jaunpur, 5 June, Nowgong, 10 June, and Mhow, 1 July 1857. The British authorities believed these mutinous Sikhs had been drawn into the revolt at the insistence of their fellow sepoys, as they were too few and too isolated to resist.[169] But this does not explain how some Sikhs come to lead the revolts of their regiments. Sikh sepoys of the 12th Native Infantry led their

---

168 The exception to this, besides the mutiny at Sialkot already discussed, was the mutiny of the three Bengal regiments stationed at Jullundur on 7 June 1857. While some Sikh sepoys, along with some Hindustani sepoys, remained loyal to the British, others were involved in the rising, but they separated from the other mutineers who made for Delhi, and absconded to their homes in the Manjha. Ibid, p136. They were quickly discovered and brought before the authorities at Amritsar, who, having listened to their story of how they were led by their comrades, liberated them without punishment and restored their arms to them. Cave-Browne, Vol I, p248. The unusual punitive measures were brought to bear on the Hindustani mutineers, however. This was done blatantly to show favour to the Sikhs, in front of their comrades, and therefore to isolate them from the Hindustani sepoys in order to prevent any united actions against the British. This separate and special treatment of the Sikh sepoys was intended, also, to attach the Sikhs, in general, to the British, because of the initial hesitation of some Sikhs, especially those in the Manjha, to side prematurely with either protagonist.

169 Dr nin, p188.

regiment in mutiny at Jhansi, on 3 June, and at Nowgong, on 10 June. The 100 Sikh sepoys of this regiment were listed as belonging to the Cis-Sutlej Division, and to the independent Sikh States located in that territory.[170] The British belief that it was due to the small number of Sikhs in the regulars that they were carried along into revolt must, therefore, be queried. Furthermore, these Sikh sepoys originated from the Sikh States, the chiefs of which had wholeheartedly supported the British from the outset. This tends to give the impression that the Sikh sepoys could act on their own, without the guidance of their traditional leaders, in fact in direct contradiction to their stance.

The most outstanding incidence of mutiny of Sikh sepoys was that of the Ludhiana Sikhs, who joined a general rising of the 37th Native Infantry and the Irregular Cavalry at Benares on 4 June. In this action official British reports state that the Sikhs were drawn into the "vortex of revolt," due principally to their small numbers.[171] The official mutiny report states that there were only 240-250 Sikhs in the 37th.[172] Conversely,

---

170 Ibid.

171 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p236.

172 Ibid, Vol I, Report from G.H.M Ricketts to G.C. Barnes, p113. Mr Ricketts states that the event of the mutiny of the Ludhiana regiment at Benares should not be held as conclusive proof against them, as any man who called himself "Singh" was eligible for entry into the regiment as a Sikh. The Indian officers were almost all Hindustanis, he maintains, with the amount of Sikhs in the regiment numbering only 240-250 altogether.

other historians assert that there was a preponderance of Sikhs in that regiment.[173] Far from being drawn into revolt against their will, Domin maintains they rose in a body, when they were supposed to be supporting the British. To prove her point she quotes an eye-witness, but ignores his statement that many Sikhs were loyal to the British.[174] Domin believes that the majority of the Sikh sepoys were mutinous, and that this was proven by their actions after the mutiny, that is, the arrival of 300 Sikhs from the Ludhiana regiment at Delhi on 6 August.[175] However, she provides no evidence of prior intent to mutiny. While Delhi was the rallying point, the focus for revolt, many of the Ludhiana Sikhs returned to their homes.

Furthermore, the Sikh treasury guard at Benares remained loyal, possibly due to the calming influence of the exiled Sikh leader, Sirdar Surat Singh.

When the Ludhiana Sikhs joined the insurgent sepoys in Benares, those Sikhs who remained loyal to the British were rewarded. Even more important a roll of loyal Sikhs was circulated among their people at home. The knowledge of having been favoured

---

173 Domin, p191.

174 Ibid, p192, quoted from Holmes, p213.

175 Ibid, p193.

would have had a salutary effect on recruits then being enlisted in the Punjab.[176]

The other important centre of activities for insurgent Sikhs was the city of Delhi. In fact, Delhi was the focus of revolt to the insurgents, whether Sikh, Muslim or Hindu, from the Punjab and from the older provinces. While the city remained in the hands of the rebels it acted as a stimulus to the anti-British cause. The more the re-capture of Delhi was delayed, the greater its attraction became as the centre of the uprising.

Many Sikhs joined the Hindustani sepoys, who had made for Delhi after mutinying and fleeing from their lines, and the Muslims fighting in Delhi under the banner of the Mughals. Although the number of Sikhs fighting in Delhi was small, they played a significant political role that surpassed their actual numbers several times over.

That the British policy of separate treatment for Sikhs, in order to prevent united actions against them, was not universally successful was borne out by the fact that Muslims and Hindus fought alongside one another against the common foe, and many Sikhs joined them in the struggle. That Sikhs, albeit not in large numbers, fought in Delhi with the insurgents at all, testified that political and religious differences could be overcome.

---

176 Ibid, p151.

Sikhs in Delhi formed into at least one Sikh regiment, which was established by 20 August 1857, just one month before Delhi was sacked by the British.[177] As a separate corps they came into prominence, and therefore appeared more frequently in the mutiny papers, which recorded who took part in daily fighting.[178]

The strongest hopes of the Sikh insurgents in Delhi were to win over the Punjab. They were dismayed at the successful British disarming of the sepoys at Mian Mir, which foiled their plans to have these Bengal regiments join the anti-British ranks. In addition, they were very disappointed that the Phulkian Princes, the Sikh prices of the independent Cis-Sutlej States, supported the British. By August, efforts were made to encourage those in the Punjab to come over to their cause. While they received news that some Sikhs had gone into the Manjha to try to stir up the inhabitants to revolt, they were also told that Sikhs were recruited by the British as sappers and miners.

Endeavours were made to encourage the Sikhs, and other Punjabis, in the Delhi Field Force to join their co-religionists in Delhi. They were successful insofar as about 125 Sikhs went over to

---

177 Ibid, p198.

178 These bundles of Mutiny Papers (Urdu) 1857, are a part of the National Archives of India, New Delhi. They detail, on a daily basis, the events, fighting, proclamations by the King of Delhi, and indeed anything that has reference to the months that the rebels held Delhi.

the insurgents' side in mid August.[179] This was a time when the British position on the Ridge before Delhi was even worse than at the beginning of July, when the inhabitants of the Punjab were becoming aware of the weakened situation in which the British found themselves. However, the majority of Sikhs in the British camp did not change sides to fight on the side of the Delhi insurgents.

The Delhi insurgents had hoped to encourage the former Khalsa soldiers to support their cause. These soldiers of the Khalsa army, highly trained and fit for military service, had lost their privileged position, and their traditional means of earning a living. As experienced soldiers they would have greatly aided the British position. But they did not immediately enlist with the British against the rebels. They had been kept out of the regular forces by John Lawrence. So, even when the British desperately needed Sikh recruits, including the former Khalsa soldiers, the latter remained aloof. More significant, however, is the fact that they did not support the insurgents of Delhi either, and seize the opportunity to overwhelm the British and gain their independence.[180] So, the great majority of Sikhs fit for armed service did not enrol on the side of the insurgents. These organised, and well-trained military men had the numbers

---

179 Domin, p200.

180 Ibid, p226.

and the ability to tip the balance of success in the direction of the side they supported.

But, the Delhi insurgents, as a whole, were undermined by their lack of organised leadership. The Sikh rebels in Delhi did not intermingle with the Hindu and Muslim rebels, in that they fought alongside them but in their own separate groups. It suited them to have established, several months into the siege, their own Sikh regiment, whence they were able to organise their particular tactics and strategies. For there were constant clashes and rivalries between the former Commander-in-chief, the eldest son of Bahadur Shah II, Mirza Mughal, and the later Commander-in-chief , Bakhut Khan, who had led the Rohilkhand Brigade into Delhi at the beginning of July.[181] These clashes eventually split the army at large.

However, it is possible that the Sikh insurgents had their own personal agenda. By supporting the rebels in 1857, those Sikhs who desired the return of a Sikh empire may have viewed such support as a means to an end, to first rid themselves of the British overlords, and then dissociate themselves from the Muslim rebels.

---

181 Sen, pp67ff.

Conversely, it is maintained, particularly by modern Indian historians, that those Sikhs who joined the rebels against the colonial power saw themselves as participating in the greater fight for Indian independence, whether Muslim, Hindu or Sikh. M.P. Srivastava posits a nationalist uprising, that is a united, widespread, popular revolt against the British.[182] He maintains it was the first war of independence to shake off British rule. Srivastava, who initiated a new approach to the study of the Indian Mutiny by moving away from the broad overview of conditions and events to a district by district analysis, or microcosmic view, believed Nana Saheb was the principal architect of the "first Indian freedom struggle by all the religious communities in India, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, who suffered at the hands of the English rulers."[183] The Indian historians S.N. Sen and S.B. Chaudhuri agree with the view that the mutiny was a national movement.[184] But a countryman of theirs, Dr R.C. Majumdar, does not consider the revolt a national war of independence."[185]

Nevertheless, even though those Sikhs who did fight with the rebels in Delhi against the British were conspicuous in their

---

182 Srivastava, p137.

183 Ibid, p165.

184 Ibid, p137; Chaudhuri, pp298-99.

185 Majumdar, p413.

battles because they could be identified, they were a minority of the population of Sikhs in the Punjab.

While the Delhi insurgents were desperate to win over Sikhs from the Punjab, they were also desirous of inciting Punjabi Hindus and Muslims to their cause. The Punjabi Muslims were of particular importance because they formed the majority community in that province, and they provided almost half of the troops reunited from the Punjab by the British after 1849.[186] Even though Bahadur Shah II, the last of the royal house of the Mughals, was made King of India in order to unite all Muslims under this revived symbol of the Mughal Empire, it actually found little favour with the Muslims from the western regions of the Punjab. The lack of collusion between Punjabi Muslims and their co-religionists in Delhi was a result of the attitude of the frontier Muslims in particular. The effete and impotent Mughal Emperor, restored on the throne of Delhi, and confined to the city, did not symbolise Islamic rule to the Pathans and Biloches of the frontier.[187] Although they, too, were Muslim, events in Delhi, and Northern and Central India, were too remote, geographically and ideologically, to induce them into joining the rebellion against the British.[188]

---

186 Domin, p175.

187 Ahmed, p150.

188 Ibid, p140.

The frontier Muslims continued to support the British throughout the mutiny, as did the Sikhs of the Punjab, on the whole. The British made valiant attempts to counteract the efforts of the insurgents to persuade Sikhs, and other Punjabis, to join them. Similarly, the British tried to break the insurgents' hold on Delhi. Their main target was the group of Sikh insurgents, as it was hoped that they would capitulate first. But they remained with the Delhi rebels throughout the siege.[189] The British believed that they had formed an unnatural alliance with the Hindustani rebels, when their natural allies were their co-religionists and countrymen who backed the British.[190]

---

189 Domin, p201.

190 Ibid; quotation from papers laid before the Commission appointed to enquire into the Organisation of the Indian Army, Appendix. Parliamentary Papers, 1859.

7. THE IMPORTANCE OF DELHI

From the very outset Delhi had become the focus of the revolt, to the mutineers and their comrades, and to the British and their supporters. The fall of Delhi was the principal event that turned the tide of the rebellion, and changed the fortunes of the British, and the insurgents. The British force before Delhi, including the Delhi Field Force, was of paramount importance to the Punjab authorities. Much of the military planning executed by John Lawrence was towards the goal of re-conquering the city at all cost. He had planned to capture Delhi in a swift coup, but by the time of the arrival of the first lot of troops it was realised that the insurgents in Delhi were stronger and larger in numbers than at first thought. The small army of 4,000 men, 20 field guns and some heavy ordnance that was sent from Phillour, soon became entrenched on the Ridge before Delhi. There they remained for the next three months. Lawrence had to maintain this nucleus of Anglo-Punjab force with men, munitions and supplies.[1]

So long as the British ikbal, or prestige, suffered no great disaster Punjabis would support the British. The Sikhs harboured a century-old dislike for the city of Delhi, headquarters of the Mughal emperors, because of the Mughal persecution of the

---

1 Thorburn, p209.

Sikh panth.[2] The British, aware of the strength of feeling the Sikhs possessed regarding Delhi, used it to prevent any unity of action between Sikhs and Muslims, and to urge Sikhs not to join the rebels within the city. In this they failed, as many Sikhs did join the Hindu and Muslim rebels in Delhi.

The city of Delhi was also an object of desire to both Sikhs and Punjabi Muslims, who were "fond of plunder," according to official British propaganda.[3] The wealth of Delhi had long been famous, and the hope of sharing in such spoils influenced many to engage in service with the British during the crisis. The march to Delhi became a kind of popular expedition.[4]

As the months went by there was a daily cry from the Ridge for more men, more guns and more ammunition. The Ridge absorbed all field and horse batteries in the Punjab, except for those at Peshawar, leaving the province in a very vulnerable state, virtually denuded of European and Punjabi troops.[5] If the British were defeated at Delhi, dire consequences would ensue. John Lawrence was willing to abandon Peshawar in order to free

---

2 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R., Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p360.

3 Parliamentary Papers, Vol I8, 1859. p322.

4 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p53.

5 Thorburn, p218.

up some 3,000 European troops for Delhi.[6] He was prepared to give up the entire Peshawar Division to Dost Mohammad, the Afghan ruler, with the proviso that, if he did not side with the mutineers, Peshawar would revert to Afghan territory, as it had been before the first Afghan War.[7]

The British realised that, no matter how much the rural population of the Punjab had been "won over" by the British agrarian reforms including their "lenient" revenue settlements, as long as Delhi remained in the hands of the rebels a military and political victory over the mutineers was not possible.[8] So important was the recapture of Delhi to the British that John Lawrence seriously contemplated the abandonment of Peshawar in order to bring those extra reinforcements, including the loyal Indian troops as well as the Europeans, to the Ridge before Delhi. But, he was dissuaded from such a drastic strategy by his administrative officers, including Montgomery, Edwardes, General Cotton, who commanded the troops at Peshawar and John Nicholson, and, most importantly, by the Governor-General, Lord Canning, who had succeeded Dalhousie.

The mutineers in Delhi had grown so strong in numbers, as they continued to arrive from the North-Western Provinces, that the

---

6 Montgomery, p77.

7 Ibid, p76.

8 Ibid, p69.

British foothold on the Ridge was often surrounded by the rebel snipers. Every action weakened the British forces without bringing the capture of Delhi any closer.

In the protracted siege for Delhi there was a great need of cavalrymen, artillerymen, and sappers and pioneers, therefore John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner, was compelled to alter his recruitment policy to allow the enlistment of Sikhs. The previous policy of disallowing the enlistment of old Khalsa Sikhs even had to be revised. Artillerymen of the former Khalsa army, then unemployed, were enlisted in the British service, about 300 of them, and sent to Delhi.

Additional cavalry regiments were formed to replace those recruited into the Delhi Field Force, and another mounted unit, Hodson's Horse, with about 450 horsemen, mostly Sikhs, was established. Various Rissalas were set up with the assistance of the Sikh aristocrats who used their influence to induce former Khalsa sowars to enter the new unit.[9] As a last resort, at a critical time in the Punjab, Mazhbi Sikhs were enlisted as sappers and miners, and pioneers. They had been employed by the British to build canals and roads after annexation, because they had not been permitted into the armed forces. In the Delhi Field Force the first units of Mazhbis were utilised by the British for the toughest and most dangerous duties. While the

---

9 Domin, p162.

Mazhbis had been reluctant to enrol in the British forces besieging Delhi, having been prevented from doing so earlier on in the fighting, by September 1857 they displayed the same eagerness as other Punjabis.

However, without the assistance of Sikhs, and Punjabis in general, the British position on the Ridge before Delhi would have been indefensible under almost insurmountable odds, and Delhi could not have been taken by assault. Five out of the eleven regiments of Punjabi infantry, and two out of five and a half regiments of Punjabi cavalry, took part in the final struggle at Delhi.[10] Out of a total effective strength of about 13,000 men, only about 3,000 were European troops.[11] In all, about 2,000 Sikhs took part in the assault on Delhi, and to these were added about 3,000 men from the contingents of Patiala, Jhind and Jammu and Kashmir. Thus, the Sikhs constituted nearly half of the Indian troops with the British,[12] all of whom had been recruited from the Punjab.[13]

Sikhs from the opposite end of the social scale were also instrumental in assuring a British victory at Delhi. Leading

---

10 Parliamentary Papers, Vol 18, 1859. p310.

11 Domin, p169.

12 This was a substantial contingent, when their numbers in the Punjab were a small minority of the whole population.

13 It is difficult to distinguish accurately the number of Sikhs in the Punjabi forces as Sikhs were not always identified as such.

members of the aristocracy, having remained loyal to the British during the second Anglo-Sikh War and having retained some of their former influence, also made an important military contribution. Sikh chiefs helped to raise Hodson's Horse, which comprised 460 men on 11 September 1857, a few days before the commencement of the assault on Delhi.[14] This corps constituted almost a third of the cavalry in the Delhi Field Force.

The large number of Punjabi recruits in the British camp outside Delhi resulted in a weakened British hold on the province. By August 1857 the situation in the Punjab was critical for the British. There were 6,000 armed Hindustani troops in the Punjab and 12,000 disarmed sepoys. Seven weakened regiments of European infantry, nearly half of whom were locked in the Peshawar Valley, were occupied mainly in guarding the disarmed sepoys.[15] The necessity of reinforcing Delhi by this time was so intense that the last available European soldiers were sent to Delhi, under the command of General Nicholson, along with the 2nd, 4th and 7th Regiments of Punjab Infantry.[16]

Meanwhile, in the Manjha, Sikhs, both former Khalsa soldiers and the rural Sikhs, neither actively supported the British

---

14 Sen, p155.

15 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p41.

16 Ibid.

nor the Hindustani rebels. They awaited the outcome of the great battle for Delhi, as did the British representatives in Central India, where a speedy British victory was desperately hoped for in order to destroy this focus of the spreading rebellion. The British resident in the Mahratta state of Indore wrote in early June that, just a month into the siege of Delhi its capture by the British was urgently needed "to act as a sedative on clients and people and the smouldering spirit of revolt.[17] Under the increasing impression that the British would be defeated finally before Delhi, uprisings and attempts to rebel extended even to the Bombay army.[18] So, Delhi held the fate of the British and the insurgents.

While Delhi was under siege it seemed to the people of the Punjab that the British could not sustain their power. As the months wore on and the rebels continued to hold Delhi, Punjabis began to doubt the ultimate success of the British. Troops sent from the Punjab to fight before Delhi left the Punjab in a weakened condition. Latent embers of disaffection developed, helping to fuel the two civilian insurrections, already discussed, at Murri and Gugera.[19] Delhi was retaken on 20 September 1857 by

---

17 Sen, p313.

18 Domin, p167.

19 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p54.

the British and Punjabi forces just before any assistance could be provided for those insurgents by the Delhi rebels, with whom the Gugera rebels had been in close contact. As soon as Punjabis, including Sikhs, heard of the fall of Delhi, their doubts regarding British rule vanished, and they clamoured to enlist with the victor.

Delhi Division and Haryana

Delhi Division and Haryana had been part of the Conquered Districts in 1803. The territory of Haryana had been made part of the North-Western Provinces by Charter Act in 1833, with the headquarters at Agra.[20] Named the Delhi Division, it comprised the districts of Panipat, Hissar, Delhi, Rohtak and Gurgaon. Delhi Division remained part of the North-Western Provinces until February 1858 when it and Haryana were added to the Punjab, because of the rebellious role they played during 1857.

The unsettled and rebellious nature of the inhabitants of this division and Haryana complicated the Delhi Field Force's situation before Delhi. General van Cortlandt, the former Sikh general, raised an irregular corps in Ferozepur, most of whom were provided by the Cis-Sutlej chiefs and jagirdars of

---

20 Yadav, p13.

that district.[21] The inhabitants of this region were predominantly Muslims and Hindus, with a very small population of Sikhs.

The inhabitants of Delhi Division and Haryana greatly impeded the progress along the Grand Trunk Road of men and equipment moving from within the Punjab to bolster the British forces before Delhi.[22] With the assistance of the chiefs of Jhind and Karnal the British managed to contain the rebellious populace.[23] Fortunately for the British, the rebels found no capable leader, and so fell to in-fighting amongst the clans, resulting in chaos and confusion. Organised manoeuvres on their part may have resulted in a different outcome at Delhi.

The only areas that remained comparatively calm and unaffected were the princely States of Patiala, Jhind, Kalsia, Buria, and small jagirs in Ambala and Thanesar.[24] In every tehsil in the district of Ambala the jagirdars and petty chiefs undermined the orders of the tehsildar, who supported the rebellion.[25]

---

21 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p334.

22 Cave-Browne, Vol II, p142.

23 Yadav, p68.

24 Ibid, 132.

25 P.M.R. Vol I, Narrative of events in the Ambala District, by Mr. T.D. Forsyth, p40.

The jagirdars and chiefs supported the British, as they did in the Punjab proper.

General van Cortlandt's irregulars, most of whom were Sikhs,[26] were brought into action against the people of Haryana from early June 1857. The original force was supplemented regularly so that by the time of the assault on Delhi they numbered 5,000 men of all arms.[27] Van Cortlandt and his troops brought most districts of Haryana and Delhi under British control by September 1857. After the fall of Delhi, the population of these districts had become thoroughly demoralised, as they had envisaged the total elimination of the British from India.[28] Gurgaon was finally crushed in late November, as the rebels there had stood their ground as long as possible.

The significance of Delhi cannot be under-estimated, as the mutiny and the British response depended on the outcome of the siege of that city, as did the response of the Sikhs in the Punjab.

---

26 Although this is not verifiable from records, as Sikhs were not distinguished from others in the Irregular Corps, it is certain that a large proportion of the irregulars were Sikhs, most probably mainly Mahwa Sikhs, for they were recruited from predominantly Sikh areas, and those contingents provided by the Cis-Sutlej chiefs were largely Sikhs. Domin, p166.

27 Ibid.

28 Yadav, p112.

The fall of Delhi was the turning point in the Indian Mutiny. Although the struggle against the British lasted into the early months of 1859, the ascendant phase of the uprising ended with the re-capture of Delhi. Furthermore, with British ikbal restored, Sikhs of all types clamoured to their side. The Punjab became an ideal recruiting centre, from where Punjabis, particularly the experienced Sikh and Muslim soldiers, including former Khalsa soldiers, were enlisted by the British.

All those who had, from the beginning, not decided which side to back, now supported the British as the fall of Delhi contained some sort of symbolic significance for all Punjabis.

After the Fall of Delhi

Although at first the British were too nervous to enlist former Khalsa soldiers, their attitude began to change dramatically due to the support the British received from the Sikh princes during the mutiny.[29] For the British, martial Sikhs equalled Khalsa Sikhs, so all who were enlisted into the Indian Army after the Mutiny were required to display the Khalsa symbols.[30]

After the immediate crisis in the Punjab was over, once they had proven their loyalty by not rising en masse against the

---

29 McLeod, Who is a Sikh? p70.

30 Ibid; Kushwant Singh, Vol II, p113.

British, ex-Khalsa soldiers began to be enrolled into the British-controlled armed forces. Frequently they were inducted into the forces which were sent into Central India to suppress the sporadic outbreaks of rebellion that continued there until the end of 1858. Many Sikhs had had the advantage of having been trained according to European military methods.

Sikhs, even more popular than before with the British, were rewarded for their loyalty. Rewards included titles, military honours, cash khil'ats or presentations, jagirs, pensions and land grants. Sikhism was on the increase as it was rapidly becoming a popular religion due to its being favoured by the ruling British, just as Sikhism had been the popular religion under Sikh rule.[31] Sikhs saw themselves as powerful, like the British; they were a privileged race in the Punjab, had fought on the winning side, and were now rewarded, had certain rights, and were employed in large numbers in the army. After 1858, a lot of those peasants recruited as additional soldiers remained in permanent employment in acknowledgement of the supportive role the rural masses played during the mutiny, by the colonial government. At the same time, the British rewarded the old Sikh aristocracy, in gratitude for their loyalty, but more importantly in an effort to create a balance in the province

---

31 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58, p55.

between the upper classes and the masses. Because of their attitude during the 1857 rebellion, Sikhs of all classes continued to belong to a privileged section of the community.

It is evident that without the active support of Sikhs, of all sections of the panth, before Delhi the British could not have defended their position, nor could they have re-conquered the city.

8. CONCLUSION

Sikh participation was especially significant during the Indian Mutiny of 1857-59. They held a privileged and powerful position in the Punjab, primarily due to having been favoured by Ranjit Singh's government. This situation was reinforced by the British who, after originally causing a reversal in Sikh fortunes,[1] continued certain of the Sikh government's economic and fiscal policies with the aim of improving the conditions of Sikh Jats. The British administrators, in tune with English economic policies of the day, were interested in producing a stable yet productive rural economy. In order to achieve this, they looked to the productive forces in the land, the rural peasant proprietor who was not inhibited by status restrictions and social mores. Sikh Jats had proved the most industrious and enterprising of all cultivators, so the British reinforced their rights and privileges, often at the expense of the nobility. Their lack of prejudice at taking up the plough, which had inhibited the progress of such communities of high social status as Rajputs, who would rather lose their land even, than risk undermining their caste by using the plough, assured them of the continuation of their privileged position.

Of the basic factors at work in 1857, affecting rural masses in their entirety, the most important factor was the readiness

---

1 McLeod, p54.

of the British to sanction the existing status of ownership in agriculture by law, and to assess a relatively moderate land tax. Early over-assessment was promptly rectified at the behest of the agriculturists' protestations, therefore grave hardships, as in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, were avoided or quickly remedied in the Punjab.[2] Thus, the peasantry in the Punjab lived and worked in better conditions than in the older provinces. This was due as much from the militant attitude of the Punjab rural masses, sadly lacking in the older provinces, as from changes taking place in British society.

The fiscal moderation of the Provincial Government in regard to the levying of land tax was not purely altruistic, but was due to the impracticability of obtaining high monetary assessments from the Punjab rural community.[3]

However, the fact that the Sikhs in the Punjab experienced better conditions than the rural masses in the older provinces does not mean this was the reason they did not break into open rebellion. Eric Stokes supplies a very good argument that negates the importance of a beneficent government[4], and firmly places the impetus for revolt, or loyalty, on other factors;

---

2 Domin, p223.

3 P.A.R. 1854-55 to 1855-56. p18.

4 Stokes, p135.

these included the importance of traditional leaders and ties of allegiance; local and regional rivalries; and, most important, the removal of status, prestige and lordship rights of the traditional elites.

While there were Sikhs who fought against the British, they were not in numbers large enough to make a great difference, either to the outcome, or to influence those Sikhs passively or actively supportive of the British. Sikh sepoys, stationed in the North-Western Provinces, mutinied with their Hindustani counterparts, at Jhansi, Nowgong, Mhow, and at Benares, where Sikhs made up the majority of the regiment, and mutinied as a body.[5] This disproves the theory of the British authorities, just after the mutiny, that the Sikhs were drawn into the vortex of revolt by the Hindustani sepoys putting pressure on the Sikhs.[6]

The theory, supported by British propagandists, that because the Sikhs, on the whole, did not rebel against the British they had no intention of doing so is disproven by the realisation, acknowledged in the official report, that, had Delhi not fallen when it did, it was highly probable that all of the Punjab, including Sikhs, would have erupted into insurrection.

---

5 Ibid, p188.

6 P.M.R. Vol II, Report from R. Montgomery to R. Temple, of the measures adopted by the different authorities during the crisis of 1857. p236.

Overall, the majority of Sikhs, civilian and military, actively supported the British, and played a decisive role in the outcome of the mutiny. Those who neither supported nor fought against the British, joined the pro-British forces once Delhi had fallen to the British.

Compared with other communities the Sikhs had the largest proportion of peasants and therefore gained most by the British policy of supporting those who actually tilled the soil. Sikh peasants were in a better situation because of privileges resulting from their former dominant position in the Sikh state, which was legalised by civil law after annexation. Accordingly, their community had the highest percentage of proprietors.[7] The privileged position of Sikh peasants seemed even stronger than before, while the rural masses as a whole did not yet face poverty or the alternative of overthrowing the colonial government, as did the peasantry of the North-Western Provinces. There had been some unfortunate transfers of individual properties, but such cases were exceptional among agriculturists at least.[8]

The British support of peasant proprietors, Sikh Jats in the main, in their land policy, their grand construction works,

---

7 Domin, p225.

8 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p22.

and other aspects of their economic policy, did not influence one way or the other the response of this group. A case can be made that it figured to some degree, as Sikhs, as a whole, did not rise against the foreign ruler. But the facts point to the possibility, even the probability according to some writers, that large numbers of Sikhs would have rebelled if Delhi had not fallen to the British when it did.[9]

The moderate land tax demanded by the British from the Punjab peasantry was at the expense of the aristocracy. British anti-feudal policy was in accordance with new directions directed from England. The jagirdars were very unhappy with the system of land assessment, for it deprived them of their arbitrary power over the proprietors.[10] They could no longer interfere in matters of land proprietorship, further eroding the social basis of the jagirdars' influence. The village communities then had the right, by law, to be left to themselves. When cash pensions were paid in the place of jagirs, they completely disconnected the link between peasants and jagirdars.

---

9 P.M.R. Vol II, Narrative of the Mutiny in the Punjab and comments of Sir J. Lawrence, Chief Commissioner. Report from R. Temple, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab to G.F.Edmonstone, Secretary to the Government of India (with the Governor-General), Lahore, 25 May 1858. p364.

10 P.A.R. 1851-52 to 1852-53. p98.

Measures were taken in the Punjab to avoid such disintegration of the old agrarian structure, as experienced in the North-Western Provinces. The land tax was reduced, therefore the peasant was relatively free from indebtedness, joint responsibility was reimposed, and the pre-emptive right of village communities was preserved.[11] So, those factors which caused acute distress in the North-Western Provinces were largely lacking in the Punjab, by 1857.

While the impact of forced land sales and increased indebtedness was greater in the older provinces than in the Punjab, it does not follow that this was the reason Sikhs, whose loss of lands through forced sales was uncommon by 1857, did not rebel against the British.

More important is the perception of grievances, and the fitness of the community to rebel. Those most affected in the North-Western Provinces were not necessarily those who rebelled. In fact, those who rebelled were from areas where the revenue demand was lightest.[12] The British policy pre-1857 of supporting the peasantry at the expense of the aristocracy was based on faulty reasoning, according to Arthur Brandreth, Settlement Officer for the Jhelum District.

After the mutiny he had become convinced that revenue reductions and lenient settlements for small land-holders were ultimately

---

11 Domin, p224.

12 Stokes, p175.

futile, for they wasted the government's resources without permitting such land improvements that would result from lenient settlements with large land-holders. Furthermore, and perhaps more important in the light of 1857, such settlements did not guarantee the contentment of the region, nor did they bind the people to the British government. Small holders exerted no influence over their countrymen, and could not be relied upon to assist the British in a crisis, whereas large land-holders, the traditional elites, wielded considerable influence, and would use it either for or against the British.[13]

This shows that some contemporary British officials came to understand that the response to 1857 did not depend upon their good government and lenient revenue demands.

When considering the attitude of the Sikhs towards the British during the uprising, Punjabi Muslims and Hindus must also be judged by the same criteria. They were both in the Punjab forces in much greater numbers than Sikhs. The attitude, and actions, of the Sikhs, therefore, must be seen in relation to the overall attitude of Punjabis.

Upon the outbreak of mutiny, the measures taken by the British to quell any dissent, were swift and brutal. These were intended to deter would-be rebels and set examples. Those

---

13 Van den Dungen, The Punjab Tradition. p33.

Sikhs as yet undecided were therefore deterred from joining the rebels. The Commissioner of the Punjab, John Lawrence, emphasised that there was sufficient force in the Punjab to crush all mutineers.[14] The swift disarming of the regular Bengal regiments stationed in the Punjab, and the general disarming policy that was extended throughout the Punjab, following the outbreak of rebellion, was also instrumental in deterring organised insurrection in that province.

The British policy of separate and special treatment of Sikhs in 1857 was a continuation of the policies initiated by Ranjit Singh that particularly favoured Sikh Jats. Furthermore, the derogatory term Purbiah was revived at this time to reinforce the enmity between Sikhs and Hindustani sepoys, who had fought on the side of the British against the Sikh army during the Sikh wars. This attitude was exploited by the British to deepen district among Indians, and therefore to prevent the possibility of united actions against the British, thereby strengthening the British position.[15] The British authorities in the Punjab stimulated this mutual animosity by offering rewards for the capture of Hindustani sepoys.[16]

---

14 Bosworth Smith, Vol II. pp72ff.

15 Domin, p128.

16 P.M.R. Vol I. p234.

At the outbreak of the uprising the social structure of Punjabi society had hardly been altered. Even the aristocracy had retained some means of existence. However, the prevention by the British of acute distress to the peasant proprietor, resulting in the passive attitude of Punjabis, and particularly of Sikhs, during the uprising, did not result in a sympathetic attitude to the colonial government. While there was no heartfelt loyalty, there also was no animosity towards the British either.[17]

The position of the former Khalsa soldiers, who had lost their privileges and traditional employment, is more difficult to understand. They were not recruited in large numbers until after the fall of Delhi. However, they did not support the insurgents either. They had fought the British twice and sustained great losses. The pressure of the Sikh masses was not there to induce the ex Khalsa to join the anti-British forces, nor was there a Sikh leader of power and influence to rally the Sikhs.[18]

The predominance of peasant proprietors who cultivated their own land was one of the peculiarities of Punjabi society that resulted form the militant Sikh Jat movement of a century before.[19] British support of actively farming peasants in general

---

17 P.A.R. 1856-57 to 1857-58. p22.

18 Domin, p228.

19 Baden-Powell, Land Systems of British India, Vol II. p569.

meant they first of all favoured the Jats who were the backbone of the Sikh community.[20] But, as Stokes asserts, this in itself is not a sturdy enough reason, nor is it proven, for not rising against the British. This is borne out by the fact that, in the initial stages of the rebellion, Sikhs in general did not support either protagonist. They could afford to wait and see who would become the ultimate victor before they chose sides. For, conversely, in those cases where civilian rebellion erupted, notably in Murri and Gugera, and also in Julllundur, there had not been a great rate of alienation of landed property. In Kot Kamalia, where the populace rose against the banias and destroyed their account books in order to wipe out any evidence of their debts, there had not been an unusual number of forced land sales.[21]

So, by maintaining the privileged position of Sikh Jats after annexation of the Punjab and enabling them to further improve their situation, the British believed they would collaborate with them against their traditional enemies, the Muslims, who in past centuries had persecuted them and tried to convert them, and the Hindustanis, whom Sikhs tended to despise in their official government positions, and as their oppressor

---

20 Domin, p50.

21 Cave-Browne, Vol II, p213.

who had helped the British to rid them of their independence.

Agricultural Sikhs, ex Khalsa Sikhs, and even the low caste Sikhs were aware of the power of the British, and would have required a much greater impetus to revolt than was available. But they did not remain loyal to the British for sentimental reasons. To back the Muslims or Hindustani rebels was merely to replace the foreign ruler with another.

The various measures taken by the British authorities during the mutiny, including their punitive measures, their disarmament programme and their province-wide recruitment drive, also helped to win over most Sikhs.

The most important single factor, though, was the restoration of British power and prestige in the eyes of Sikhs when the British forces re-took the city of Delhi.

So, in conclusion, the majority of Sikhs were loyal to the British in 1857 because it suited them, not because of any heartfelt alliance. Also, they lacked the cohesion and leadership to organise a full-scale attack on the British overlords.

Besides, some Sikhs were not loyal to the British, but rallied to the defence of Delhi with British and Muslim insurgents.. Overall, Sikhs tended to respond in the manner that those around them, i.e. other Punjabis, responded.

For the remaining months of 1857, after the fall of Delhi, Sikhs of all walks of life were indeed loyal to the British, and greatly helped suppress rebellion in the older provinces where incidences of mutinous action continued until the early months of 1859.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I Official British Sources [material seen on microfilm or microfiche marked *]

*Imperial Gazetteer of British India: District Series, Punjab. [Microfiche, from National Library of New Zealand, Wellington].
Amritsar District, Lahore 1884.
Ferozepur District, Lahore 1884.
Jullundur District, Lahore 1908.
Lahore District, Lahore 1884.
Ludhiana District, Lahore 1908.
Sialkot District, Lahore 1884.

Mutiny Reports from Punjab and North-Western Frontier Province, 2 Vols. Lahore 1911.

*Punjab Administration Reports [Microfilm, on loan from Dr Andrew Major, University of Singapore].

General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1849-50 to 1850-51, Calcutta 1853.

General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1851-52 to 1852-53. Agra 1855.

General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1854-55 to 1855-56 inclusive. Calcutta 1856.

General Report on the Administration of the Punjab Territories, from 1856-57 to 1857-58 inclusive. Lahore 1858.

*Papers relating to the Mutiny in the Punjab in 1857, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, 1859. Vol 18.

*Punjab Settlement Reports [Microfilm, from National University of Australia, Melbourne].

Report on the Revised Settlement of the Amritsar District, Lahore 1883-93.

Report on the Revised Settlement of the Lahore District in the Lahore Division of the Punjab, 1865-69. Lahore 1873.

Report on the Revised Settlement of the District of Ferozepur, Lahore 1872.

Report on the Revised Settlement of the District of Ludhiana, 1878-83. Lahore 1883.

II Non-Official Sources

AHMED, Akbar S., Millenium and Charisma Among Pathans: A Critical Essay in Social Anthropology. London 1976.

BADEN-POWELL, B.H., A Short Account of the Land Revenue and its Administration in British India. Oxford 1894.

BADEN-POWELL, B.H., Land Systems of British India. London 1892. 3 Vols. Reprint, New York, London 1972.

BALL, Charles, The History of the Indian Mutiny. London n.d. Reprint, New Delhi. 1981.

BANGA, Indu, Agrarian System of the Sikhs. New Delhi 1978.

BARRIER, N. Gerald, Punjab History in Printed British Documents. A Bibliographic Guide to Parliamentary Papers and Select Nonserial Publications, 1843-1947. Columbia 1969.

BARTER, Richard, The Siege of Delhi, Mutiny Memories of an old Officer. London 1869. Reprint, London 1984.

BOSWORTH-SMITH, R., Life of Lord Lawrence. 2 Vols, London 1901.

BROWN, Judith, Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy. Oxford University Press 1985.

CAVE-BROWNE, J., The Punjab and Delhi in 1857. 2 Vols., New Delhi 1858. Reprint 1986.

CHAUDHURI, Sashi Bhusan, Civilian Rebellion in the Mutinies. Calcutta 1957.

CHAUDHURI, Sashi Bhusan, English Historical Writings on the Indian Mutiny 1857-1859. Calcutta 1979.

CHAUDHURI, Sashi Bhusan, Theories of the Indian Mutiny (1857-59). Calcutta 1965.

CHOPRA, G.L., The Punjab as a Sovereign State (1799-1839). Hoshiarpur 1960.

COOPER, Frederick, The Crisis in the Punjab from 10th May 1857 until Fall of Delhi. London 1858.

CUNNINGHAM, J.D., History of the Sikhs. Delhi, 1849. Reprint 1955.

DAVIES, C.C., "The N.W. Frontier 1843-1918" in Cambridge History of India, Vol VI, Chap. 25. Reprint, Delhi 1958.

DOMIN, Dolores, India in 1857-59. A Study in the Role of the Sikhs in the People's Uprising. Berlin 1977.

EDWARDES, Michael, Red Year. The Indian Rebellion of 1857. London 1973.

FORREST, G.W., A History of the Indian Mutiny. 3 Vols, London 1904-1912.

FOX, Richard, Lions of the Punjab. California 1985.

GREWAL, J.S., New Cambridge History of India, The Sikhs of the Punjab. Cambridge University Press 1990.

GUSTAFSON, W.E. and Jones, K.W., Eds., Sources on Punjab History. Delhi 1975.

HOLMES, T.R.E., A History of the Indian Mutiny and of the Disturbances which accompanied it among the Civil Population, London 1883.

IBBETSON, Denzil C.J., Punjab Castes. Delhi 1916. Reprint, New Delhi 1974.

JEFFREY, Robin, What's Happening to India. New York 1986.

KAYE, J.W., History of the Sepoy War in India. 3 Vols. London 1880.

KAYE, J.W. AND Malleson, G.B., History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858. 6 Vols, New Edition, London 1896.

LADENDORF, Janice M., The Revolt in India 1857-58. An annotated bibliography of English language materials. London 1978.

McLEOD, W.H., Early Sikh Tradition. Oxford 1980.

McLEOD, W.H., Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion. Oxford 1968.

McLEOD, W.H., Textual Sources for the Study of Sikhism. Manchester University Press 1984.

McLEOD, W.H., The Evolution of the Sikh Community. London 1976.

MAJOR, Andrew J., Unpublished PhD thesis, Return to Empire, Punjab Society and the British 1839-1858. Australian University 1981.

MAJUMDAR, R.C., The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857. Calcutta 1963.

METCALF, T.R., Land, Landlords and the British Raj. Northern India in the Nineteenth Century. London 1979.

MONTGOMERY, Brian, Monty's Grandfather, A Life's Service for the Raj. Poole 1984.

Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North-West Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857. Ed. by William Muir, 2 Vols, Edinburgh 1902.

SEN, Surendranath, Eighteen Fifty-Seven. New Delhi, 1957. 2nd Reprint, Calcutta 1963.

SINGH, Kushwant, A History of the Sikhs. 2 Vols., Princeton University Press 1966.

SITARAM Pandey, From Sepoy to Subedar, being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army, written and related by himself, transl. by Col. Norgate. Lahore 1873. Reprint, Ed. James Lunt, London 1970.

SRIVASTAVA, M.P., The Indian Mutiny 1857. Allahabad 1979.

STOKES, Eric, The Peasant and the Raj. Studies in agrarian society and peasant rebellion in colonial India. Cambridge University Press 1978.

TALBOT, Ian, Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947. Baltimore 1988.

THORBURN, S.S., The Punjab in Peace and War. Edinburgh 1904.

TREVASKIS, H.K., Land of the Five Rivers. An Economic History of the Punjab from the earliest times to the year of grace 1890. Oxford University Press 1928.

VAN DEN DUNGEN, P.H.M., "Changes in Status Occupation in Nineteenth Century Punjab" in D.A. Low (Ed.), Soundings in Modern South Asian History. London 1968.

VAN DEN DUNGEN, P.H.M., The Punjab Tradition. Influence and Authority in Nineteenth Century India. London 1972.

YADAV, K.C., The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana. Delhi 1977.

YOUNG, Keith, Delhi 1857. Edited by H.W. Norman and Mrs Keith Young. London and Edinburgh 1902.